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Occupying Land, Occupying Schools:  
Transforming Education in the Brazilian Countryside

By

Rebecca Senn Tarlau

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

in

Education

in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Professor Peter Evans  
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## Abstract

### Occupying Land, Occupying Schools: Transforming Education in the Brazilian Countryside

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Harley Shaiken, Chair

To what extent is it possible for a social movement to transform a public education system in order to promote an alternative social vision? Under what conditions can this implementation occur within the bureaucratic state apparatus, at the regional and national level? How does state-society collaboration develop, in contexts where civil society groups and the state have opposing interests? This dissertation addresses these questions through an investigation of the educational initiatives of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, or MST), a national social movement of rural workers struggling for agrarian reform. MST activists have been able to implement educational proposals in rural public schools that encourage youth to stay in the countryside, foster a sense of belonging to the movement, promote collective forms of work, and practice participatory governance.

Part I provides an overview of the multi-level and multi-sited political ethnographic approach used to conduct this research. It then reviews the literature on social movements and state-society relations, and considers how a Gramscian framework can be used to analyze how social movements implement educational proposals in public schools that are opposed to the interests of the dominant class. Part II examines the history and national expansion of the MST's educational initiative: how activists first developed their educational proposals; why the movement went from promoting popular education to participating in the public educational sphere; and why and how the federal government appropriated these ideas as a new approach to rural schooling, known as *Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside). Part III explores the MST's attempt to transform public schools in three state educational systems and two municipalities, and why the MST's success differs drastically across the country depending on the state capacity, government orientation, and level of MST mobilization in each region.

Comparison of the outcomes in these subnational cases yield new and unexpected insights into the relationships and conditions that lead to or impede participatory governance: (1) low-capacity governments and weak institutions can offer unusual openings for social movements to implement participatory initiatives; (2) high-capacity state antagonism negates the positive effects of mobilization; (3) not-so-public forms of contention are an effective strategy that social movements can use to engage the state and participate in the provision of public goods; (4) technocracy is a significant barrier to participatory practices, even among supportive governments; and, (5) state-society collaboration is not possible if the leadership of a social movement does not have a strong connection to its base.

Significantly, this research shows that the implementation of a social movement's goals through the state apparatus does not always lead to movement cooptation or decline. Additionally, public schools, normally institutions reproducing state power, can be used by marginalized communities to support alternative social visions. However, the case of the MST also illustrates that this process is never straightforward, easy, or permanent, as it requires communities to first develop a common vision, and then work with, in, and through the ever-changing power structures to implement this vision.

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## Preface

“I’m a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will.”  
—Antonio Gramsci

In 2004, I had the opportunity to work with an inspiring group of women in the periphery of Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil, who were using Freirean educational theories to organize popular education courses in their community. The goal of these courses was twofold: (1) Help people reflect on the structural reasons for the poverty, inequality, sexism, and racism in their communities; and, (2) Encourage people to develop plans for concrete actions that could contest these injustices. At that point, I had been involved in political organizing as an undergraduate at the University Michigan for several years. However, I had never thought about education as an avenue of social change. Now I had a new path I was committed to following: participating in and learning about the relationship between education and social justice. This path was the beginning of my decade-long investigation of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, or MST), a national social movement struggling for agrarian reform and the implementation of alternative educational practices in the Brazilian countryside. It was not the writings of Paulo Freire that led me to study education; it was Freire in practice—the hundreds of organizations around the world that implement Freire-inspired educational programs every day—and my exposure to the women in Recife, that convinced me of the transformational potential of learning.

I first read about the MST in 2003, a year before my visit to Brazil. I was impressed by the far-reaching struggles of the movement. These activists were not only fighting for the redistribution of land, but were also attempting to build alternative communities on this land by investing in small farming, agroecology, collective agricultural production, gender equality, youth participation, participatory governance, and an alternative educational model. The movement’s holistic vision for rural communities founded on an economy of solidarity drew my attention, especially in a world where manufacturers were fleeing from the United States to avoid paying living wages, the U.S. labor movement was being threatened, rural farmers were being pushed off their land, climate change was no longer deniable, and the profit of the financial sector was increasing exponentially. For me, as for many other frustrated activists committed to social equality, the MST’s ability to weather this neoliberal affront was an inspiration.

I came to graduate school with the intention of merging these two interests by researching the role of education in the MST’s struggle for societal transformation. My prior work as a popular educator in Bolivia, and as an adult educator in an immigrant rights center in Maryland, compelled me to ask: How do educational processes contribute to both the emergence of social movements and their long-term viability? As a large, national social movement deeply invested in Freirean educational practices, the MST seemed like the perfect context to explore this question.

In June 2009, I arrived at a dusty, one-room bus station in the rural town of Santa Maria da Boa Vista, in the western semi-arid region of Pernambuco, to visit my first MST settlement. I had only been given one phone number by my MST contact in the capital city of Recife, and as I walked to the phone booth I contemplated my options if no one answered. I would eventually learn that one phone number is always more than enough with the MST: a young man soon pulled up on a motorcycle to drive me into the MST’s social and political world, via a bumpy dirt road. That summer I visited dozens of other MST settlements. In each of these communities

there was an MST education collective that organized informal educational activities for the children, youth, and adults, as well as working to transform the public school sphere.

The MST's educational initiatives were impressive, but so were activists' emphasis on the importance of culture in their movement, on their dedication to identity formation, their daily rituals, their continual political analysis, and their incorporation of youth into their agricultural cooperatives. It was immediately clear to me that education was only one of the many practices that contributed to people's dedication and sense of belonging to the movement. Although I wanted to highlight the role of educational practices within the MST, and the effect that these had on the movement's long-term vitality, I did not know how I could possibly isolate educational from other practices that were integrated into the movement.

Simultaneously, as I traveled around the country, I became fascinated by the MST's relationship to the public school sphere. I went to dozens of schools where teachers were either MST activists or enthusiastic supporters of the movement. The MST's flag was hung proudly from many of these school walls, and students sang the MST national anthem each morning. Textbooks engaged issues such as agroecology, production processes, active citizenship, and solidarity economies. Students were making decisions about the educational content they were studying. Teachers were meeting collectively rather than being isolated in their classrooms.

My research interests soon converged as a different type of question: What are the conditions that allow a social movement to implement its goals in the public sphere? In the public schools I visited, the MST's ability to participate did not seem to be reducible to the government's political affiliation, as many conservative mayors were also embracing the MST's educational initiatives. It also did not seem to be exclusively related to MST mobilization, as there were certain locations where the movement was strong but local officials still did not allow for the MST's participation in the schools. The reasons for this variation became the driving empirical question of my dissertation.

This dissertation is fundamentally about the relationship between civil society groups—what Gramsci referred to as the “ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private’”—and the state. In researching a social movement that actively engages the state, I go beyond the common assumption of movements as outside of and in opposition to the polity. In analyzing a set of educational practices that promote an alternative social and political vision, I also go beyond the notion of public schools as simply reproducing state power. And in designing a study where I look at variation across regions, I go beyond any assumption of the “state” as a unitary actor, and instead focus on the different sets of social conditions that allow social movements to transform state institutions.

This research is critical for three reasons. First, we are currently living in a global context where a diverse set of governmental and nongovernment organizations, political officials, and other actors embrace participatory governance as a method for sustainable development and social change. Yet social movements around the world have been demanding a voice in state decision making for decades, and many of these activists have already refined the process of participatory governance internally within their own organizations. How does the conversation about participatory governance shift when the demand for change comes from a contentious social movement wishing to participate in the provision of public goods, rather than a government initiative?

Second, the role of participatory governance is nowhere more relevant than in the sphere of public education, where schools are in close and daily contact with local communities. Politicians, school board members, and principals of all persuasions emphasize the importance of

community participation in schools. However, when communities come with concrete proposals for those schools, they are often rebuffed or ignored. How does the MST's attempt to implement alternative educational pedagogies in schools help us understand how a large-scale bottom-up process of school reform takes place in practice?

Finally, over the past few years the topic of social movements has returned to center stage around the globe. From the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street, from the *Indignados* in Spain to the student protestors of Chile, from Gezi Park in Turkey to the recent street protests in Brazil—it is impossible to ignore contentious politics. We are thus compelled to ask: what are the actual implications of these social movements for contesting power and transforming the state? In this dissertation, I deal with this question directly, analyzing how a contentious social movement implements its goals within the bureaucratic state apparatus. The answer should be relevant to anyone who wants to know, concretely, if and when another world is possible.

## Acknowledgements

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# **PART I: INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT, METHODS, AND THEORY**

## **Chapter 1: Introducing Brazil, the MST, and the Educational Context**

On Sunday, February 9, 2014, hundreds of buses carrying thousands of peasant farmers from across Brazil arrived in the capital city of Brasília. These farmers travelled to the capital to participate in the Sixth National Congress of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST)—the largest and most well known agrarian social movement in Latin America. The 2014 national congress coincided with the movement’s 30th anniversary, and was the culmination and celebration of two years of debate among thousands of peasant families about the future of the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil.

The Sixth MST National Congress confirmed the fact that public education is a central component of the MST’s struggle for an alternative development model in the rural countryside. On the third day of the congress, February 12, 2014, five hundred children—the *sem terrinha*, or sons and daughters of the families living in MST communities across the country—rode in buses to the Ministry of Education. Several MST activists who had been waiting by the Ministry held the doors open as the first bus arrived, allowing dozens of children to run into the front lobby. Hundreds of more children soon followed. The message of this protest was clearly written on banners the children were holding: “37 million schools closed in the countryside.” “Closing a school is a crime!” “*Sem Terrinha* against the closing and for the opening of schools in the countryside!” Meanwhile, inside the Ministry of Education the recently appointed head of the ‘Education of the Countryside’ office—an office created in 2004 as a direct result of the MST’s mobilizations—tried to convince the Minister of Education to meet with the children.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, after three hours of occupation and protest, the Minister came downstairs to address the children, promising them that the federal government was committed to providing quality education in the countryside.<sup>2</sup>

### **Focus of the Dissertation: What is this a Case of?**

Broadly, this dissertation is about the relationship between social movements, states, and public educational reform. More specifically, this dissertation is a multi-level, multi-sited analysis of how a social movement institutionalizes its goals within the bureaucratic state apparatus. Throughout the twentieth century, informal educational practices have become a central component of political mobilization. From the Highlander Center in Tennessee, offering educational workshops that influenced many leaders of the civil rights movement (Morris, 1984; Payne, 1997), to Catholic priests espousing liberation theology (Berryman, 1987; Keck, 1992), the Black Panther schools in Oakland (Payne & Strickland, 2008), the literacy campaign in Nicaragua (Arnové, 1986), and workers’ colleges (Altenbaugh, 1990)—incorporating education within a social movement is nothing new. What is unique about the MST is its attempt to implement these alternative educational practices within the formal public school system.

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<sup>1</sup> Informal conversation with Edson Anhaia, 12 February 2014.

<sup>2</sup> This vignette comes from participant observation in this protest.

This dissertation is a case of a relatively successful national educational reform effort, led by a radical social movement. It is an exploration of “what happens when social movements ‘win’ and change the ‘rules of the game’” (Baiocchi, 2005, p. 18). By focusing on public education, this study also heeds Michael Apple’s (2006) call for “more substantive, large-scale discussion of feasible [educational] alternatives to neoliberal and neoconservative visions, policies, and practices” (p. 80). This dissertation is about the constraints and possibilities for bottom-up institutional reform.

Over the past two decades, the active coordination between different levels of the Brazilian state and the MST for the provision of public education in rural areas of Brazil has become increasingly common. At the same time, in certain regions of the country, schools in which MST activists have participated for over fifteen years are being shut down. These drastically different contexts raise several questions that are at the heart of this study: Under what conditions do states cede power over education policy or school management to social movements, and why? If the activists who take part in this national movement all have similar educational goals, why do they face drastically different reactions from government officials across the country? And what does the relative control this movement is able to achieve over public education in some areas mean for both the schools and the movement?

For more than three decades, MST activists have been experimenting with alternative approaches to pedagogy and learning that support the movement’s vision for small-farming and collective agricultural production. Although the MST’s educational practices were initially limited to areas of agrarian reform, in the late 1990s the MST began to align with other rural organizations and develop a more general educational proposal. It was through these alliances that the MST’s educational practices became recognized as a national pedagogical approach for all rural areas: *Educação do Campo*. This educational philosophy has gotten increasing recognition over the past fifteen years and has been institutionalized nationally through a series of federal laws and decrees. The major idea behind *Educação do Campo* is that students should not have to commute to the city to study; rather, all rural citizens have a right to quality schools that are based in their rural realities and that prepare and encourage students to live and work in the countryside.

The federal recognition for *Educação do Campo* is not just another example of government actors conceding to social movement demands; it represents the blurring of the state-society divide, as activists become part of the process of educational provision. These MST activists not only propose alternative educational ideas to government officials but also engage in the implementation of these educational practices by working with teachers and school principals, facilitating discussions with communities, organizing teacher trainings, and writing new curriculum. However, arriving at this form of collaboration is rarely a consensual or conflict-free process; movement activists have an openly political agenda, and must engage in contentious actions to become participants in the educational sphere. Reactions from state and municipal governments to the MST’s educational proposal vary widely, with state officials supporting this participation in certain locations while criticizing activists as “guerrilla trainers” in other regions.

How has the MST been able to achieve national recognition for their educational ideas at the federal level? And what accounts for the variation in MST activists’ ability to participate in educational provision in different state and municipal governments? In the following sections, I place these questions in context by providing a brief overview of Brazil’s political, economic, and agrarian histories. Then, I briefly review the rise of the MST in the early 1980s, and discuss

the basic structure of the movement. I also contextualize the MST's educational struggle within the public educational landscape in Brazil. Next, I discuss the methodology I used in collecting data for this dissertation, and I reflect on my own positionality and the challenges that I faced obtaining research access. Finally, I outline and discuss the major arguments of each chapter.

## **Brazil's Political, Economic, and Agrarian Context**

### ***Political and Social Structure: Federalism and Regional Diversity***

Brazil is a federal republic, with twenty-six states, a federal district, and hundreds of municipalities sharing sovereignty over the governance of the country. Legally known as the *União* (Union), at the federal level power is shared by three branches of government: the executive power (President), legislative power (Federal Senate and Chamber of Deputies), and judiciary power (Supreme Federal Court, Superior Court of Justice, and other regional federal courts). At the state governance level there is a governor, a state senate and a chamber of state deputies, and state courts; in the municipalities, the mayor, a city council, and municipal courts share power. There is multi-party system in place in Brazil, with over fifteen political parties and politicians frequently shifting between party affiliations. If one party does not get a majority vote in the first round of an election, the vote goes to a second round between the top two candidates.

Brazil's democracy is relatively young, only becoming a republic in 1888 after sixty-four years of independence in the form of a monarchy. Democracy was interrupted several times since 1888, with Getúlio Vargas ruling as a personal dictator from 1930-1945, and then a military dictatorship from 1964 to 1984. The current constitution in Brazil, known as the "Citizen's Constitution" was only written in 1988. This was the seventh constitution in Brazil's history. The first had been written during the period of monarchy (1824); the second during the first two years of the Brazilian Republic (1891); the third and fourth during Vargas' dictatorship (1934 and 1937); the fifth after Vargas was forced to leave power (1946); the sixth during the beginning years of the military dictatorship (1967); and finally, this seventh constitution after the return to democracy (1988). The constitution of 1988 established many new rights for Brazilian citizens, and decentralizes much governance power to municipal and state governments.

Brazil is divided into five regions, with unique geographical and demographic characteristics. The poor North region encompasses the Brazilian Amazon, and is the least populated part of the country, only contributing 5 percent of the Brazilian GDP.<sup>3</sup> This Northern region and its seven states have the majority of the indigenous population.

The Northeast region includes nine states, contributing 13 percent of the GDP, primarily due to the tourism industry. However, the Northeast also has the highest rates of poverty and inequality in the country. Geographically, this region includes both the tropical coast and the semi-arid *sertão*. The Northeast was the heart of the sugar cane industry during the colonial era, and has the largest African-descendent population in Brazil.

The Central-West region is known as the Brazilian frontier, encompassing both a hot savanna and more tropical climates. Although previously sparsely developed, this region has turned into the center of agribusiness, and specifically soybean production and cattle farming, contributing 9 percent of the GDP. This region has three states in addition to the federal district, Brasília, which was built in 1960.

The richest part of the country is the Southeast, contributing 56 percent of the GDP, with the state of São Paulo alone representing 33 percent. This is a region where political power was

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<sup>3</sup> All of the numbers about GDP are from 2010, see: (IBGE, 2011).

historically tied to economic power, and specifically an alliance between the coffee and cattle industries known as *café com leite* (coffee and milk). The Southeast has a diverse population, with migrants from around the country moving to this region for economic opportunity, in addition to a large Japanese population.

Finally, in the South region there are three states that contribute to 16.5 percent of the GDP. This is ethnically the most European region in Brazil, with a large Italian, German, and Polish population, and a strong tradition of small farming, which is also currently being challenged by the rise of agribusinesses. Map 1.1 illustrates these different regions and states in Brazil.

Map 1.1: Map of Brazilian States and Regions



### ***Agrarian Context: A History of Land Concentration (1500s-1960s)***

Brazil is characterized historically by tremendous inequality in land ownership.<sup>4</sup> These unequal relations date back to the early 1500s, when a system of land grants known as *sesmarias* allowed powerful Portuguese “captains” to distribute large tracts of land to private interests. Traditionally this land grant system was supposed to require owners to work the land in order to keep it; however, this definition was largely ignored. Throughout the colonial period this *sesmaria* land grant system was the only way to access land (Wolford, 2010b, p. 38). After Brazilian independence, in 1822, much of this private land was supposed to be “returned” to the Brazilian state (literally “returned” land, or *terra devoluta*). However, through a process of land

<sup>4</sup> While this only a brief overview, there are many extensive agrarian histories of Brazil. For an overview in English, see: (Andrade, 1980; Welch, 2009; Wolford, 2010b).

grabbing and the production of false land deeds—known as *grilagem*<sup>5</sup>—rural elites ensured that they could maintain ownership over their lands.

Landlessness in Brazil is also a legacy of the slave trade, the largest slave trade in the Americas. Africans were imported into Brazil primarily as slave-laborers for the booming sugar cane industry, which began in the sixteenth century and was in full force by the mid-seventeenth century. According to Williamson (1992), by the end of the sixteenth century there may have been as many as thirteen to fifteen thousand black slaves in Brazil, which constituted seventy percent of the labor force on plantations (p. 173). In the northeast part of Brazil, slaves made up half of the population, and nearly two-thirds of the population in sugar cane regions (Williamson, 1992, p. 173). Brazil was the second to last country in the Americas to end slavery, officially doing so only in 1888. Much of the descendent slave population remains landless.<sup>6</sup>

In 1850, a few decades before the end of slavery, a new land law was established, which made land available only through purchase. This new law facilitated the consolidation of large-scale properties, made it difficult for small land holders to purchase land, and tightened restrictions on squatters (Skidmore, 2010; Wolford, 2010b, p. 39). Beginning in the 1870s, the government also began to encourage immigration to Brazil, primarily from Germany and Italy, in order to populate the southern part of the country. While some of these immigrants were able to receive small plots of land, many of them were tied to unequal labor contracts on coffee plantations, which did not even compensate them enough to repay their travel from Europe. However, with a new labor law in 1890, these contracts were deemed illegal and many of these immigrant workers were expelled from the plantations. The expelled workers then sought land in the southernmost states of Brazil, creating a significant small-farming community (Wolford, 2010b, p. 41). Nonetheless, landlessness continued to be a norm throughout the country.

During the first decades of the twentieth century there was uneven regional development throughout Brazil, with São Paulo increasingly industrialized and the northeastern states still ruled by rural oligarchs (known as *Coroneis*) who wielded absolute authority in the countryside. The “agrarian problem”—land concentration, unproductive land estates, landless families—was mostly ignored by the government. Even during the fifteen year period when the populist dictator Getúlio Vargas ruled the country (1930-1945) and attempted to construct a class compromise with the poor, social policies were primarily focused on protecting urban workers (Andrade, 1980, p. 2). Rural laborers were not even given the right to organize a union until 1963.

### ***Rural Resistance (1940s-1960s)***

Nonetheless, the first half of the twentieth century was a period of intense rural resistance. The Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) was founded in 1922, and with the supervision of Moscow it became one of the best-organized left groups in Brazil. After being banned in 1947, PCB activists took up the strategy of radicalizing rural workers. This proved to be an effective approach given the severe conditions of poverty in which these workers lived. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was a dramatic rise of mobilization in the countryside, with peasant leagues, rural workers associations, radical literacy campaigns, and other organizing efforts. The PCB was responsible for many of these initiatives. The PCB’s efforts, were, however, often in competition with Catholic priests, who were also attempting to win the loyalty of rural workers (Welch, 2009). The communist organizers took a more radical approach, while

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<sup>5</sup> This term comes from the tactic of using dead crickets to make documents look older (*grilo* means cricket).

<sup>6</sup> There was a lot of resistance during this period of slavery as well, with Africans escaping their captivity and forming run-away slave communities, known as *quilombos*.

the catholic organizers were more “moderate, but persistence and firm” in their “demand for the extension of already codified urban workers; rights to their rural counterparts” (Maybury-Lewis, 1994, p. 68). In 1954, the PCB founded the Union of Agricultural Farmers of Brazil (ULTAB), the first national rural workers’ organization.

The social mobilizations of the 1940s and 1950s were slowly moving the federal government towards the left. In 1961, President Jânio Quadros resigned from office and the left-leaning Vice President João Goulart became president. Goulart was the previous Minister of Labor under Getúlio Vargas, from 1953 to 1954, and was already mistrusted by the military and the politically conservative elite. On top of this, Goulart entered office in a time of economic crisis for Brazil, when rates of inflation were nearly 65 percent (Williamson, 1992, p. 424). Goulart tried to reconcile the need for deflationary economic policies with progressive reforms, but this only led to a deadlock in Congress. In 1963 he passed a Statute on Rural Labor, which legalized rural unions, but also required that all registered unions be part of a national labor confederation. On December 22, 1963, National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) was founded. The founding of CONTAG was a compromise between social sectors; an effort to give rural laborers the right to collective bargaining, while ensuring that they were part of a national organization that could be controlled. To the dismay of elite landowners, communist activists elected themselves to the leadership of CONTAG (Houtzager, 1998). In addition, Goulart began to advocate for other social reforms, including agrarian reform. These events scared middle-class wage earners, industrial sectors, and foreign investors, giving the military the support it needed for the 1964 military coup.

### ***Political and Economic Shifts: Military Dictatorship and Industrialization (1964-1984)***

The military dictatorship in Brazil lasted for two full decades. Although the first military president, Marshal Humberto Castelo Branco (1964-1969), only saw the military coup as a means to institute fiscally conservative economic policies, the military hard-liners pushed for the complete silencing of the opposition. The next military dictator, Marshal Artur da Costa e Silva (1967-1969), created the Fifth Institutional Act in 1968, which gave the president dictatorial powers, dissolved the Congress and state legislatures, suspended the Constitution of 1946,<sup>7</sup> and imposed censorship on the press. The majority of political figures on the left, leaders of the labor movement, and progressive academics were jailed or exiled. During the rule of Costa e Silva and of his successor, General Médici (1969-1973), any political organizing had to be underground.

The first ten years of the military dictatorship was also a period of rapid industrialization, known as Brazil’s “economic miracle.” Between 1968 and 1974 the economy grew at an average yearly rate of 10 to 11 percent, and by the mid-1970’s the volume of exports had quadrupled (Williamson, 1992, p. 429). However, this economic “miracle” only helped the industrializing southern part of Brazil, and even there only the rich and upper-middle-class Brazilians saw the benefits. In reality, the economic miracle was only increasing the uneven regional development that had characterized the first part of the twentieth century, and creating a bigger divide between the rich and the poor. While in 1960 the richest ten percent of the population received 39.6 percent of the national income, the same population received 50.9 percent of the national income by 1980. The poorest fifty percent received only 12.6 percent (Williamson, 1992, p. 456). The rapid industrialization in the south caused thousands of poor peasants and small-farmers to move to large industrial cities such as São Paulo. However, even though industries were expanding rapidly, the city could not absorb this huge labor force. The outskirts of São Paulo became huge

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<sup>7</sup> This was the fifth Brazilian constitution, written after Getúlio Vargas was forced to resign in 1945.

*favelas*—slums with large numbers of people living in tin shacks without running water, electricity, or sewage disposal. In the Northeast, the situation was even worse, as the region was largely ignored by the military government, considered irrelevant for Brazil's economic growth.

### ***Political Abertura: Oppositional Unionism and the PT (1978-1984)***

In 1974, General Ernesto Geisel (1974–1979) came to power and there was finally a move away from repression to a more democratic rule. The first voices from civil society began to speak out openly against the military regime, and this period became known as the *Abertura* (political opening). Press censorship was relaxed, torture suspended, and free elections for congress were held. By the end of the 1970's, President Geisel had ended the Fifth Institutional Act and allowed many exiles to return home. By the succeeding military presidency of General João Figueiredo (1979-1985), the political *Abertura* was officially in place.

Organized social sectors were an active part of the transition to democracy from 1970 to 1985. Labor organizations and urban periphery groups were among the first sectors that started standing up to the military dictators, denouncing the regime and demanding a transition to democracy. On March 12, 1978, workers at the Saab-Scania auto factory in São Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo, went on strike, demanding a twenty percent raise. The news about the strike spread to other factories, which resulted in more work-place actions, thus ending fifteen years of industrial calm (Seidman, 1994, p. 159). A new nationally recognized labor leader, Luis Inácio da Silva (Lula), was at the forefront of these strikes. During these strike waves there were also massive assemblies in the stadium of São Bernardo, and discussion within the unions about the formation of a new workers' party. By 1980 there were even more strikes, better organized and less spontaneous, and the Workers' Party (PT) was also founded.

The formation of the PT occurred through a diverse coalition known as the *articulação* (articulation), which included oppositional trade unionists, rural and urban popular movements, intellectuals, and progressive priests following liberation theology (Keck, 1992, p. 114). The PT proposed a new concept of politics whereby the people formally excluded from the political realm could be empowered to speak for themselves (Keck, 1992, p. 3). In 1983, oppositional labor leaders affiliated with the PT founded the Central Union of Workers (CUT), and organized a general strike of about three million workers to “sensitize the government to the problems of the working-class” (Seidman, 1994, p. 37). With this rising discontent among a diverse coalition of working and middle class populations, it was clear that the military dictatorship was no longer viable. In 1984, the first civilian president in twenty years came to power.

### **Rise of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST)**

The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) was born during this historical moment, along with the PT and the CUT. Founders of all three organizations were in dialogue with each other, often through their relationships with the Catholic Church and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). During the military dictatorship, rapid economic growth and industrialization had coincided with a massive migration from rural to urban areas. In 1940, less than thirty-two percent of the population lived in cities; by 1991, seventy-five percent of Brazil's total population was urban (Plank, 1996). For the Brazilians who remained in rural areas, hunger and malnutrition increased as the Brazilian government pushed small landowners off their land in an attempt to increase the dominance of mechanized agricultural industries. While urban poverty also increased with Brazilian industrialization, the exclusion of rural workers from social protections provided to the formal urban workforce (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008) increased the difference in economic and social conditions between rural and urban populations.



In an attempt to address this rural poverty, the military dictatorship had implemented a program to populate the Amazon basin by allowing cattle farmers to purchase land and resettling landless families from the northeast as the labor force. For these landless families, however, resettlement was a extremely problematic. Not only was the climate harsh and the soil very poor for farming, but the majority of families were faced with unbridled violence from the cattle industry bosses. In many cases these rural families stayed landless, only now they were in an unfamiliar area with few community networks (Branford & Rocha, 2002, pp. 5–6).

The landless rural families in the southern states were also given the option to migrate to the Amazon, but most of these families refused to be relocated. During the first decade of the military government there were 270,000 landless families looking for a way to survive in the southernmost state of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul. Without any hope of agrarian reform, and a general refusal to migrate to the Amazon, the only other option was to invade the land that was allocated by the state to Indian reservations. By the mid-1970's over eight thousand families had decided to move into the multiple Indian reserves in the south, an illegal act that the military government agreed to ignore (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 6). Of these eight thousand families, two thousand went to live on the Nonoaí reserve of the Kaingang Indians in the late 1960s. On May 4, 1978, after protesting for over ten years to the authorities, the Kaingang Indians declared war against the settlers. The landless families that were forced off the reserve felt as though they were left with absolutely no viable options for survival. The government kept insisting on relocating them to the Amazon, and although some families consented, a large contingent of families continued to refuse. Priests from the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) began to discuss with these landless families possible actions to take.

On September 7, 1979, one hundred and ten families participated in the occupation of the *fazenda* (large plantation) Macali, in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. After a little more than a year and an outpouring of national support, the state government finally told the families that they could have the rights to this land. After this initial occupation, several other land occupations took place in the south. The families in these later occupations faced much more physical violence from the authorities, and had to spend longer amounts of time living in camps before receiving the rights to live on this land.

The MST camp on *fazenda* Encruzilhada Natalino, occupied in 1979, is known among movement activists for the difficulties it went through. Right after the occupation, the military police surrounded the camp and threatened violent action against the rural people. However, the military government was hesitant to act on its threats because it worried that a bloodbath would become international news (A. Wright & Wolford, 2003, p. 34). The power of public opinion, and the growing support from the church, labor unions, and other civic organizations, deterred the military police from taking action against the camped families. In June of 1983, after more than three years living in the camp, the families finally won land access. This victory was possible because the families at Encruzilhada Natalino were supported by a large network of allies. In the midst of the optimism following the Encruzilhada victory, there was agreement to solidify a national movement.

In January of 1984 a four-day meeting was held in the town of Cascavel, in the southern state of Paraná, attended by rural workers who had been involved in land occupations throughout the South, including families from Encruzilhada Natalino. At this meeting, the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers' Movement was officially founded. Although the Catholic Church and labor unions had been played a major role in organizing the occupations that led to the founding of this national movement, the families at this meeting decided that the MST would be an

autonomous organization, not connected to the church, a labor union, or a political party. The slogan of the newly formed organization was “Land for those who live and work on it.”<sup>8</sup>

### ***The MST Structure***

Today the MST is a national social movement, whose leaders claim to represent over one million women, men, and children living on agrarian reform camps or settlements.<sup>9</sup> The movement continues to fight for land access through occupations of large unproductive landed estates, in which hundreds of landless rural families enter privately owned lands, set up makeshift camps, and refuse to leave until the government gives them legal rights to live on the land. According to recent estimates, by 2006 the MST had succeeded in winning the land rights for 134,440 families (Carter & Carvalho, 2009, p. 329). The movement also inspired dozens of other rural social movements to organize similar occupations, which has also resulted in the redistribution of land. Tens of thousands of people are still living in MST camps, waiting for land rights. The MST is currently present in 23 of the 26 Brazilian states. While the movement began in the South, it is now strongest in terms of numbers of land occupations per year in the Northeast. The South, however, still has the most economically viable agricultural cooperatives.

The leadership structure of the MST is collective and decentralized. This means that in every settlement and camp there are collectives of families (known as base nucleuses) that discuss the issues facing their communities. Two coordinators, ideally one woman and one man,<sup>10</sup> are then sent to a camp or settlement collective, which makes final decisions about governance decisions. These camp and settlement collectives also send two coordinators to a regional collective, to coordinate regional decisions, and likewise the regional collectives send representatives to a statewide collective. The statewide collective then sends two people to participate in the MST national directorate. In each of these regional, state, and national collective bodies, members of MST “thematic sectors” also participate, who discuss specific issues such as education or agricultural production. In 2006 there were thirteen sectors in the MST, founded at different moments in the movement’s history.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to note that although the MST is a nationally coordinated social movement, it is far from a homogenous or a cohesive group. As Wolford (2010b) describes, a hundred rural workers who march in the name of the MST one day, might abandon their land and the entire movement the following year. Membership within the MST is fluid, heterogeneous, and full of conflict; participants have distinct racial, gender, economic, and agrarian histories; and power struggles within the movement are as common as power struggles outside of the movement. The MST activists who have traditionally led the movement are generally from the southern part of the country where the movement first began. As Wolford (2010b) writes, these discourses emerging from the southern part of the country must be “negotiated and refigured through practice” (p. 16) in other regions. Thus, the “MST” looks different across the country.

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<sup>8</sup> For more extensive histories on the MST’s founding and expansion, see: (Branford & Rocha, 2002; Carter, 2009; Fernandes & Stédile, 2002; Fernandes, 1996; Ondetti, 2008; Wolford, 2010b; A. Wright & Wolford, 2003)

<sup>9</sup> Before the MST wins the rights to the land they are occupying, the MST community is referred to as a camp (*acampamento*). After the government has officially given land rights, the area is settlement (*assentamento*).

<sup>10</sup> This gender equity is a relatively recent development in the movement, occurring in the mid-2000s.

<sup>11</sup> These sectors and their date of founding are: Formation (1989), Education (1988), Front of the Masses (1989), Finances (1989), Projects (1989), Production, Cooperation, Environment (1992), International, Relations Collective (1993), Human Rights (1995), Communication (1997), Health (1998), Culture (2000), Gender (2000), Youth Collective (2006). [Taken from (Carter & Carvalho, 2009)]

### ***The MST and Education***

The MST is known around the world for its success redistributing land in Brazil; less well known is the movement's struggle for the right to free primary, secondary, and tertiary education for all children, youth, and adults living in MST settlements and camps. In Brazil, many rural families only have limited access to schools. Additionally, in many rural areas where education is provided, school systems are dysfunctional, teachers frequently do not go to work, and there are very few resources and almost no administrative support (Plank, 1996; Reimers, 2000; Schwartzman, 2004). Over the past thirty years, the MST has successfully pressured state and local governments to build hundreds of rural public schools on agrarian reform settlements. In addition, the MST has been able to offer literacy programs, vocational high school courses, teacher-training programs, bachelor degree programs, and other formal educational offerings to families living on settlements and camps.

The MST's struggle over education in areas of agrarian reform is a fight both for *access* (public schools built in MST settlements; educational programs offered specifically to activists) and for *control* (the influence MST activists have in schools and programs to implement their educational proposal). The MST has set up regional educational collectives that work with local governments to coordinate teachers, students, and community members to promote better functioning schools and implement the movement's educational proposal. However, in many areas of the country, state and local governments refuse to work with the MST and have banned MST activists from schools in their own communities. The following table is an estimate (based on the MST's numbers) of the amount of schools, teachers, and other educational programs that MST activists and families living in areas of agrarian reform have been able to access.

*Table 1.1: Schools, Teachers, and other Educational programs accessed by MST families*

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Elementary Schools  | 1,800    |
| Elementary School Teachers  | 8,000    |
| Students in K-12  | 250,000  |
| Adult Learners  | 20,000   |
| Adult Education Instructors   | 2,000    |
| Infant Education Instructors  | 500      |
| Graduates from Teacher Certification Courses (high school level)      | 1,2000   |
| Graduates from Cooperative Administration Courses (high school level) | 1,300    |
| Graduates of health and nursing classes                               | 200      |
| Students studying medicine in Cuba                                    | 120      |
| Partnerships with Public Universities                                 | 60       |
| Publications on MST Pedagogy  | 63 books |
| National and International Prizes in Education                        | 5        |
| Number of graduates from PRONERA Bachelor Degree Programs**           | 14,000   |

\*All information (except on PRONERA) comes from the edited volume by Miguel Carter, *Combatendo a Desigualdade Social: O MST e A Reforma Agrária no Brasil*, p. 311

\*\*Information about the Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA) comes from a presentation at the Fourth National PRONERA Seminar, in Brasília, November 2010

As Table 1.1 illustrates, the MST has succeeded in obtaining significant access to a range of educational services. However, despite these educational gains, the MST's ability to influence these schools and programs is a constant process of negotiation and contestation with government actors across the country. The MST's educational goals include an emphasis on students being involved in both intellectual and manual labor—in order to develop intellectual rural workers—as opposed to viewing labor in rural areas as something for uneducated workers. MST activists want schools to promote cooperative forms of work, as well as holistic learning that does not adhere to traditional disciplinary boundaries. The vision is of schools as spaces of democratic governance, where parents, teachers, and students make collective decisions about how schools function. Additionally, the MST wants schools that help students understand political realities, so they can participate in transforming these realities. These goals, discussed in Chapter 3, are in contrast to the Brazilian government's historical disregard for rural schooling.

### **The Brazilian Public Education System**

The public school system in Brazil has been the center of passionate debate since the 1930s, when a group of intellectuals, the *Escolanovistas* (“New-Schoolers”), wrote the “Manifesto of the Pioneers of National Education,” a document that critiqued the traditional Catholic Church-run education system and declared free and public education to be the right of all Brazilian citizens and the domain of the state. The *Escolanovistas* advocated for a decentralized educational system, financed by the federal government but under the control of local governments. In the 1940s, there was an attempt to pass a Basic Education Law (LDB) that incorporated some of these beliefs, but advocates were faced with a long and hostile debate about who should be in control of the Brazilian school system: a central authority versus local governments with administrative autonomy; public versus private institutions. The Basic Education Law that was eventually passed in 1961 embodied many of the original ideas of the *Escolanovistas*, but was dismissed by the military government in 1964 (Plank, 1996).

During the next two decades, the military dictatorship invested in education as a tool for economic development, but primarily spent money on secondary and higher education. Under this highly centralized system, local and state governments had little to no autonomy (Plank, 1996). In 1971, with the Education Reform Law, some authority over primary and secondary education was ceded to state governments; but it was not until the Constitution of 1988 that complete authority over education was devolved to state and municipal governments. The constitution left it ambiguous, however, which powers belong to the state and which belong to the municipality, which means that today there are both state-run and municipal-run primary and secondary schools functioning across Brazil. The one requirement that the federal government maintained was that both state and municipal governments invest 25 percent of their tax revenues in education (Florestal & Cooper, 1997).

Between 1980 and 1996, the percentage of students finishing fourth grade across Brazil rose from 50 to 75 percent and the percentage finishing secondary education, from 17 percent to 25 percent (Reimers, 2000, p. 67). While this demonstrates an increase in educational access, these numbers also show that in 1996, 75 percent of the population was still not graduating high school, and 25 percent was not even finishing fourth grade. Additionally, there is an enormous range in educational expenditures between schools in different states, and between state and municipal schools in the same state. In 1990, a study found that per pupil expenditures on state schools in the poorest northeastern states were only one-third of the level of per pupil expenditures on schools in the wealthy southern states (Reimers, 2000).

In 1998, there was a reform in the financing mechanism of primary education in Brazil, and the federal government began to guarantee a minimum level of spending per student for all primary schools through the National Education Fund (FUNDEF),<sup>12</sup> which provided financial support for the state and municipal schools that could not reach this minimum (Reimers, 2000; Schwartzman, 2004). However, FUNDEF did not eliminate educational inequity, and there is still a high degree of stratification between schools in terms of both funding per student and educational attainment. Schwartzman (2004) argues that the minimum funding per student required by the federal government is about half of what state administrators claim they need per student. Plank (1996) writes that the reason for this inadequate provision is the “radical and systematic disjunction between the educational objectives that are publicly affirmed in the Constitution, development plans, and campaign promises and those that are actually pursued in the educational system” (p. 12). Quality public education for the majority of the Brazilian population continues to be an elusive goal.

It is within this decentralized and unequal educational context that MST activists first began to participate in the public school system in the early 1980s. First, MST activists demanded public schools in their communities; then, activists demanded the space to participate in the governance of these schools. Again, this struggle must be understood in the context of an eighty-year debate about who has the right to control the Brazilian public school system. At stake is not only the MST’s educational proposal, but the more general goals of teaching youth basic competencies—reading, math, science—that have been denied to rural communities for decades.

### **Methodological Approach: Political Ethnography**

This dissertation is based on 17 months of multi-level, multi-sited, ethnographic field research that I conducted between 2009 and 2011, with one follow-up visit in February of 2014. This study is a political ethnography: ethnographic research that focuses on “politics and its main protagonists” (Auyero & Joseph, 2007, p. 1). As Auyero and Joseph (2007) argue, neither routine politics (which involve parties, unions, and NGOs) nor contentious politics (involving social movements) seem to be at the top of the current ethnographic agenda. This is unfortunate, these authors argue, because ethnography is an important tool in capturing both the practices of politics (strategic choices) and the meaning of these practices (culture/meaning making), as they are unfolding on the ground (Auyero & Joseph, 2007, p. 3). Political ethnography has the potential to help us understand: 1) the impact of structural change on collective action and the transformation of the culture of popular protest; 2) the hidden and clandestine links between different political actors; and, 3) how “political hegemony is constructed, challenged, and reconstructed” (Auyero & Joseph, 2007, pp. 4–6).

My goal in this dissertation is to shed light on the process through which social movement activists implement their goals within public institutions. Consequently, this is both a study of contentious politics—mobilizing protests, occupying buildings, and engaging in non-institutionalized actions—and a study of normal, everyday politics—backroom deals, state-sanctioned advisory boards, teacher meetings. By living in MST communities for seventeenth months, participating in regional MST education collectives, and observing state-society interactions, I was able to observe the process of politics as it took place on the ground.

Charles Tilly (2007) argues that there are a “continuum of procedures for collection of evidence” within political ethnography (p. 248). These include in-depth interviews;

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<sup>12</sup> This program was eventually extended to secondary schooling as well, and renamed FUNDEB in 2007.

conversations; participant observation; passive observation of interaction; covert observation of interaction; and unobtrusive observation concerning the consequences of interactions. In my field research I engaged in almost all of these methods of data collection. I also analyzed dozens of documents produced by the movement and the state about these educational initiatives. These diverse research methods have allowed me to collect a rich range of data, which I triangulate (Mathison, 1988) in order to assess the validity of any one source.

In addition to utilizing a range of methods, this ethnography is both multi-level and multi-sited. By multi-level I refer to the fact that half of the research was on the MST, and half on the Brazilian state. Some interviewees, such as principals and teachers who became participants in the movement, fall on both sides of the state-society divide. This attempt at multi-level research was not limited to interviews; I also divided my observation time between events organized by the state and events organized by the MST. In addition, I participated in as many spaces as possible where MST activists and the state were *interacting*—from state-sanctioned advisory boards, to political protests, to Sunday night dinners. I was able to assess both the official perspective of these state and civil society actors, and how their actions contradicted and confirmed these official positions.

By multi-sited ethnography, I refer to the fact that I did research in four different states of Brazil, within five different public school systems (three state public school systems and two municipal school systems).<sup>13</sup> Within each state school system, the schools that were part of my field site were often hundreds of miles apart. Nonetheless, I still considered these schools one “field site” because my unit of analysis was an entire “school system.” I tried to understand all of the components of these school systems, from the decisions of the Secretary of Education at the top, to the students’ experiences and the relationship between parents and teachers in each community. I spent approximately five months in Rio Grande do Sul, seven months in Pernambuco (in two different municipalities<sup>14</sup>), two months in São Paulo, and two months in Ceará. Any perspective I lost from not spending more time in each location, I gained in my ability to compare political processes and practices across field sites. Comparison was a central component of my research design, and allowed me to generalize about political processes.

### ***Data Collected***

The majority of my research was conducted in four states of Brazil—Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo, Pernambuco, and Ceará. I chose these field sites after nine weeks of pilot research in the summer of 2009, in order to compare regions with distinct outcomes in MST-state coproduction.<sup>15</sup> For example, I selected the state of Rio Grande do Sul because it was the most widely known example of MST-state coproduction, but this outcome had been radically reversed several years prior to my field research. On the other hand, Santa Maria da Boa Vista, in Pernambuco, is also held as a prize example of the MST’s successful participation in the public school system, but this collaboration has been much more stable. I chose Água Preta because it is the municipality with the highest concentration of MST settlements in Pernambuco, but unlike

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<sup>13</sup> I also did research on the state public school system in Pernambuco as well, but this data was not included in the dissertation. This is because Pernambuco does not have any state schools on MST settlements. Therefore, the politics of *Educação do Campo* are focused on educational initiatives outside of the public schools.

<sup>14</sup> In Pernambuco there are very few state schools located in rural areas, which means that all of the schools in MST settlements and camps are part of the municipal school systems.

<sup>15</sup> I use the term “coproduction” to refer to the MST’s participation in the public school system. I explain the origins of this term in Chapter 2.

Santa Maria, no MST-state coproduction has ever developed. I chose to research São Paulo because it was another example of the absence of MST-state coproduction, but in a very different political and economic context than Água Preta. Finally, I included the state of Ceará late in my study, because of the MST's excitement about the high schools recently built on settlements in this state, which activists said were one of the clearest examples of MST participation in public schooling. The choice of Ceará also complemented my other cases by including a relatively poor, low-capacity state among my comparison of state school systems.

In summary, I chose five locations where the MST has a significant presence (in terms of numbers of settlements, not necessarily levels of mobilization), but where outcomes in coproduction differed drastically. This allowed me to compare the political, economic, and social conditions in each region that produced these different outcomes. Half of my interviews, a total of sixty, were with government officials, bureaucrats, and teachers. I asked these state actors about their relationship to local MST activists, how these relationships have shifted over time, the merits and flaws of the MST's educational proposal, and the daily interactions between MST activists, teachers, and principals. The other half of my interviews, approximately seventy, I conducted with MST activists and other social movement participants in these regions. I especially focused on interviewing statewide leaders and regional activists involved in the MST education collectives. In these latter interviews, I asked about the history of the MST's educational initiatives, the process of participating in the school system, barriers activists faced, and the bureaucrats and politicians who facilitated or prevented these collaborations. Through these questions, I was able to determine the visions MST activists and government actors have for education in regions of agrarian reform; the key factors that shift these visions; the characteristics of the negotiations between MST education collectives and government actors; the variables that affect these negotiations; the pedagogical practices in schools with different levels of MST influence; and, the consequences of these MST's practices.

Beyond interviewing, I also took extensive field notes throughout the seventeen months of field research, recording informal conversations with state and civil society actors, community visits, classroom observations, teacher trainings, and participant observation of activities organized by regional MST education collectives. In each of the four regions I studied, I also lived with an MST educational activist, and a central part of my data collection was participating in the daily activities of my host. Living in these MST rural communities for an extended period of time allowed me access much more extensive data than simply visiting these areas and conducting interviews. I also spent time inside schools on MST settlements as a participant observer of the daily activities of teachers, school principals, and students. This enabled me to gather evidence on indicators of MST-state coproduction—for example, the visibility of the MST flag and the teaching of the MST national anthem—as well as more embedded forms of control, such as the incorporation of MST history in the school curriculum, the organization of student and teacher collectives, and the use of alternative pedagogies inside of the classrooms. I analyzed all of these data and compared my cases in order to assess the conditions that produced or prevented coproduction in each municipal or state school system.

In the chapters of this dissertation on the federal context (Chapter 4 and 5), I draw extensively on thirteen interviews I conducted with government officials in Brasília, and information about national-level politics I collected in interviews with national MST and CONTAG activists. In addition, to analyze federal politics I coded data from the Pastoral Land Commission's (CPT) database on yearly agrarian protests to identify numbers of protests concerning education between 2002 and 2012. I also participated in several educational events

organized by the federal government, including the Fourth National Seminar on PRONERA in November of 2011, and several other *Educação do Campo* coalition meetings.

Finally, in order to assess how the MST originally developed its educational approach, I focused on interviewing the founders of the MST education sector, who are predominantly from Rio Grande do Sul. Through these interviews, and an analysis of dozens of MST publications about their educational practices, I traced the historical circumstances in which the MST first defined its educational proposal. I also visited and spent extensive time in several of the MST's "movement schools"—private schools outside of the public school system where the activists have complete autonomy to implement the movement's educational proposal. Finally, I also read many of the sources that MST activists drew on to develop this proposal.

### ***Research Positionality***

My connection to this project, and my interest in the relationship between social movements and education, has been a decade-long journey. As an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan I was involved in local struggles to promote workers' rights and oppose sweat shops. I majored in Latin American Studies because I was moved by the continent's history of resistance to U.S. imperialism. I decided to study in Brazil to learn more about the many social movements that were joining together to insist that "another world is possible" (Mertes, 2004). I arrived in Brazil my junior year of college, wide-eyed and ready to be inspired.

My first week in the country was in the northeastern city of Recife, known for high levels of poverty and violence. Our study abroad cohort visited a local non-profit organization in the periphery of the city, Group Wonder Woman (GMM). The mission of this organization is "to fight for the promotion of Human Rights from a gender, race and ethnicity perspective, and for access to citizenship rights for a population that has been the victim of social exclusion, and for the empowerment of women, in order to construct a new society"<sup>16</sup>—a lofty mission for such a small organization! The "method" of GMM's community organizing was "popular education" (Kane, 2001)—a type of informal education for poor communities that draws on the ideas of Paulo Freire and his famous book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2002). For the women of this organization, popular education is a *method* of social justice work.

This experience in Brazil defined the next decade of my life. I decided to become a popular educator, in order to develop similar educational programs. First, I dedicated myself to reading the works of Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, and other grassroots educators (Freire, 2001; Gadotti, 1994; hooks, 1994; Horton & Freire, 1990). Next, I spent a year engaging with grassroots educational initiatives in Bolivia. Then, I briefly worked as an adult educator for an immigrant workers center near Washington, D.C. Eventually, I decided to return to graduate school to learn more about one of the most famous social movements in Latin America currently incorporating popular education into its movement: the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement.

### ***Getting Access***

Given the challenges the MST currently faces across the country, movement activists are understandably skeptical of outside scholarship on the movement. There have been dozens of people who have researched the MST and either left without offering anything in return (not even their publications), or worse, have only emphasized negative aspects of the movement and provided fodder for conservative critics (Navarro, 2009, 2010). Furthermore, hosting researchers takes time, energy, and financial resources away from the MST's other tasks.

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<sup>16</sup> See GMM's blog at: <http://gmulhermaravilha.blogspot.com>



In contrast to smaller movements, the MST's national scale and resource base has allowed it to develop a formal process for dealing with researchers. The MST has an International Relations Sector (SRI), which primarily focuses on maintaining relationships with international organizations financially supporting the movement, but is also charged with vetting all research requests. If researchers are able to make direct contact with the SRI—usually through previous connections—they are asked to write a justification of their research project and the ways in which it will contribute to the movement. Committees of “Friends of the MST” throughout Europe and North America facilitate this process of vetting. For example, U.S. citizens who request to do research with the MST must fill out a lengthy survey before the Friends of the MST-U.S. will consider their request.<sup>17</sup> This process requires scholars to clarify their contribution to the movement from the very beginning of the research process.

In my first contact with the International Relations Sector (SRI), I emphasized my background as a political activist in United States and the lessons that the MST could teach U.S. social movements about popular education. I also suggested the possibility of sharing my experiences as an activist in the U.S. context with the MST, in order to promote more international dialogue. At no moment did I make a claim about how my research findings would contribute to the movement's struggle. At this stage I did not think that promoting the data I would gather as inherently valuable would align with the MST's vision of collaboration.

The SRI eventually granted me permission to study the MST. I deliberately downplayed my position as a doctoral student throughout my fieldwork, and instead, I emphasized my identity as a political activist. This choice of self-presentation represented me as “another activist in solidarity” with the movement, rather than as solely a researcher. At first, I thought that this use of my previous activism could be potentially unethical. However, I realize now that if international solidarity truly aligns with one's larger research intentions—as it does mine—then this emphasis is simply part of acknowledging the importance of activism relative to research. In the end, I have found that the MST activists themselves know how to determine one's level of political commitment.

### ***Sharing, Collaboration, and Critique***

In his description of knowledge production within grassroots community organizations, in contrast to academic research, Choudry (2013) notes the priority activists put on collaboration, sharing, and feedback. One activist he interviews describes this collaboration as a type of “peer-review” process, which allows activists to be challenged and receive serious feedback from their peers (Choudry, 2013, p. 141). This concept of collaboration and sharing goes beyond the idea of “member checking” commonly found in textbooks on qualitative research methods. Member checking involves the process of “testing” a researcher's data, analytical categories, and interpretations by “checking” its validity with informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In contrast, this process of sharing that Choudry describes is about not only assessing the validity of one's findings but also allowing activists' conclusions to inform every stage of the analytical process. Dedication to dialogue with social movements is critical—before, during, and after research.

Throughout my seventeen months in Brazil I was constantly engaging in conversations with activists about my research findings. The questions I asked during interviews transformed throughout this period, as I would include data collected from previous interviews in my

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<sup>17</sup> After returning from fieldwork, in 2012, I became part of the Friends of the MST-U.S. national coordinating committee, and I currently participate in this vetting process.

subsequent data collection. This was also a form of triangulation, as I asked activists to reflect on the responses and experiences of other actors across the country, and assess their local relevance.

In addition, I asked the MST national leadership if I could present—or what they refer to as “socialize”—my research findings before leaving Brazil. My goal was twofold: First, I wanted to “give back” to the movement in some way before returning home, especially given how long it would take to write up my research findings and translate these findings into Portuguese. Second, I wanted to hear activists’ reflections on my initial research findings and see if there were any major critiques about how I was analyzing my data. It is a testament to the importance that the MST places on research, collaboration, and sharing, that in response to my request to present my research the MST leadership insisted that I do so in five different locations across the country. Consequently, I presented my research to a course that MST activists were taking on adult education in the state of Ceará, to the MST education sector in Rio Grande do Sul, to a national course on the Pedagogy of the MST taking place in the MST’s first “movement school” in Veranópolis, to a PRONERA class on pedagogy in São Paulo, and to a PRONERA graduate program on “Marxism and Education” at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

Before each of my presentations I gave the MST activists a handout with the following set of questions to answer: What parts of the presentation resonated with the experiences in your state? What aspects of the data presented do you disagree with, or believe are incorrect, or irrelevant to your own reality? Can you describe your own experiences and interactions with municipal, state, and federal officials, in relationship to the attempt to implement the pedagogy of the MST in schools, formal university courses, or other educational programs? These surveys, and the questions that MST activists posed after each of my presentations, helped solidify many aspects of my arguments. However, these reflections also put some of my conclusions into question. After each presentation I carefully recorded the activists’ critiques and comments. I have incorporated these reflections throughout my writing process. In this sense, not a single one of the arguments I make in my dissertation is entirely my own; they were all developed in conversation with movement activists.

### ***Race and Gender Implications for Qualitative Methodology***

Before concluding this discussion on methodology, I want to reflect briefly on what it has meant to be a white, female researcher in Brazil. As Gillan and Pickerill (2012) write, “celebrating and being open about our identities and their complexity” is a “core ethical approach to research” (p. 139). There has been some important scholarship analyzing the role gender and race play in qualitative research (Fine, 1989; Twine & Warren, 2000), and more specifically, the experiences of researchers of color versus white researchers in Brazil (Twine, 2000). The data I collected as a qualitative researcher—both as a researcher of the Brazilian state and a researcher of the MST—was always negotiated through my identity as a young, white woman from the United States.

My identity opened many doors throughout the research process, and no doubt closed others. At times my whiteness, my gender, and not least of all my youth, would turn me into a sexual object, while also someone to be protected, concerned about, and constantly accompanied. This latter positionality was often helpful in my work with the MST, as entire activist communities became concerned about my presence and my safety. Furthermore, my gender and youth made me “unthreatening,” and I found that activists—especially those not directly connected to the MST national leadership—freely shared their stories without any reservation. Political officials, most of whom were men, were also open to talking to me and seemed unconcerned about my probing questions. Several politicians openly expressed interest in

becoming romantically involved, and thus, were even more open to talking with me at length. This is most certainly related to my whiteness, as the histories of unequal race relations in Brazil means that “being white” is often associated with beauty (Twine & Warren, 2000). However, as a woman I found that other doors also closed unexpectedly, specifically when I was in political spaces that were not common for women to be present. Thus, the data I could collect in Brazil was always contingent on my position as a young, white woman, from the United States.

## **Chapter Outlines**

This chapter has been a brief introduction to the political, economic, and agrarian history of Brazil, the rise of the MST, the nature of the Brazilian public school system, and the methodology I used to conduct this research. In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical framework that I use in this dissertation. First, I outline how state-society relations are conceptualized in three different perspectives: the political process approach to social movements, the state-society literature, and a Gramscian understanding of the “integral state.” Then, I discuss how public schools and their relationship to the state and civil society are understood by each paradigm. I argue that the Gramscian perspective offers the most useful framework for analyzing the MST’s attempt to engage the state in the provision of the public goods. Then I provide a theoretical framework for analyzing variation in the MST’s participation in public schools across regions. I argue that while Gramsci provides a useful overall theoretical framework, the literature on social movements and state-society relations is helpful for analyzing variation across cases. I end this chapter suggesting some implications of these arguments for studies on participatory governance and “real utopias.”

The next three chapters encompass Part II of the dissertation, which is focused on how the MST succeeded in transforming the federal educational context. First, Chapter 3 analyzes why the MST became concerned about public schooling, and how activists developed their pedagogical approach. This chapter is especially relevant for scholars of critical pedagogy. While Paulo Freire is held as the principal inspiration for this educational literature (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2001; hooks, 1994; Leonardo, 2004; Macedo, 2006; McLaren, 2003), MST activists have had to draw on other theorists in developing their pedagogical proposals. This is because Freire never wrote about how to transform the public school system; Freirean practices were almost always limited to non-formal, popular educational contexts. While not rejecting Freire completely, the MST searched for other educational theorists who thought about the role of public schools in a socialist society. In the 1980s, MST activists began to draw on several Soviet theorists. This chapter explores how these theorists arrived in Brazil and the ways in which members of the movement have adapted these theories to their contemporary context. Finally, at the end of this chapter I discuss the critical role of “educational utopias” in the MST’s attempt to implement their proposal in the public school sphere. I argue that it is only through “educational utopias”—spaces outside of the public educational system where the MST has full autonomy—that activists knew how to implement the movement’s proposal, by living this proposal for several years in practice.

The next two chapters of Part II examine the federal educational context. These chapters analyze how the MST’s educational proposal became implemented within two federal agencies, but resulted in different institutional trajectories. Chapter 4 begins by analyzing how the MST captured the national imagination surrounding possibilities for rural education in the late 1990s, and changed federal educational policy between 1997 and 2010. One of the central claims of this chapter is that this success was part of a purposeful class alliance, most notably with the rural

workers union (CONTAG). This class alliance was possible because MST activists began framing their educational pedagogies in more general terms, for all people living in the Brazilian countryside—*Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside). This was not a broadening of the MST's own educational goals, but rather, a strategic move to get leverage at the federal level, which was encouraged by international organizations supporting the MST's educational initiatives. However, this strategy had the unintended consequence of the MST losing its power to unilaterally define the content of these pedagogies, specifically due to the role CONTAG began to play. Nevertheless, through this national alliance and the election of the PT to the presidency in 2003, *Educação do Campo* became the hegemonic policy for rural education in the Ministry of Education. However, this process has meant that other powerful actors now want a voice in defining the meaning of this educational proposal. Most significantly, the agribusiness lobby has become a new public advocate for *Educação do Campo*.

Chapter 5 examines the incorporation of the MST's educational proposal into a different federal ministry, the Ministry of Agricultural Development, through the Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA). While in Chapter 4 I tell the story of how MST activists aligned with other rural social movements in order to incorporate their educational goals into the Ministry of Education, in Chapter 5 I show how MST activists became the privileged educational actor in a different institutional context. Consequently, PRONERA was able to maintain many of the radical components of the MST's educational proposal. I explore how MST activists use PRONERA to “occupy” the university system, and the critical role of the first PRONERA university degree program. Then, I analyze the institutional uniqueness of INCRA, the agency inside the Ministry of Agricultural Development that administers PRONERA. A central argument in this chapter is that the *nature* of the institution into which social movement goals become institutionalized is critical for understanding the trajectory of these goals. Finally, I argue that because PRONERA has been able to maintain a counter-hegemonic status within the Brazilian state apparatus, it is constantly open to frontal attacks. I explore an example of an attack that took place from 2009 to 2010, and I argue that continual MST mobilization will be critical to keep this program functioning.

Part III of the dissertation focuses on engaging the decentralized state, or in other words, how MST activists are able to implement their educational goals in public schools across the country. I choose three state public school systems and two municipal public schools systems, which I separate into three cases of success and three cases of failure. Chapter 6 analyzes the three cases of success—state public schools in Rio Grande do Sul between 1996-2006; the municipal public school system in Santa Maria da Boa Vista, Pernambuco; and state public schools in Ceará. A major argument I make in this chapter is that although the best recipe for MST-state coproduction continues to be high state capacity, a mobilized civil society, and public officials dedicated to participatory governance, coproduction can also develop in unexpected contexts—such as locations with low state capacity and deeply engrained systems of political clientelism. In addition, it is the interaction between factors that is critical. Whereas low-state capacity facilitates the MST's ability to convince clientelistic politicians to implement the movement's educational proposal in Santa Maria da Boa Vista, in Ceará a lack of state capacity prevents coproduction from developing. In this latter case, it is only when the federal government partners with the state that MST participation in public schools is possible.

In Chapter 7, I examine three cases of failure, where the MST has been unable to participate in the public schools system despite continuous attempts to do so over the past two decades. This chapter explores several barriers to MST participation. In the case of Rio Grande

do Sul post-2007, a high-capacity antagonistic government prevents coproduction from continuing, even amidst high levels of social mobilization. Then, in 2011 when a PT governor is elected, it is the MST itself that is too demobilized to reestablish previous levels of coproduction. This latter case illustrates the critical role of MST mobilization in civil society, even under a supportive government. The next case of São Paulo is also an example of a high-capacity state that is antagonistic to the MST. However, unlike Rio Grande do Sul where high levels of MST mobilization resulted in intense ideological battles between the MST and the government, in São Paulo there is relatively little conflict. While the state government is in an intense fight with the teachers' union, the government's technocratic attitude towards schooling, its capacity to ignore federal trends, and its urban-centric vision has succeeded in calmly preventing the MST's participation in schools for over two decades. This has resulted in a new "common sense" among MST activists in São Paulo—that the movement will simply never participate in the state public school system. Thus, technocratic hegemony has produced well-resourced schools on MST settlements, without the MST's educational proposal. Finally, the case of Água Preta illustrates that even when there are political openings for coproduction—such as a clientelistic governments with low state capacity—if the MST loses its ability to garner the consent of families living in areas of agrarian reform for its educational project, then coproduction is impossible.

In the conclusion I review the major arguments of Parts II and III of the dissertation, summarizing the general barriers and catalysts to institutional transformation. Then, I outline the main findings that emerge from comparing these cases between and across federal, state, and municipal levels. I suggest some lessons these findings offer to scholars of social movements, state-society relations, and education. Finally, I end with a few broader reflections on how this research is relevant for participatory governance, public education, and social movements.

## Chapter 2: A Gramscian Perspective on State-Society Relations

Sara Lima, the Executive Secretary of the State Secretary of Education of Pernambuco, waited in her office. She knew that in a few hours the daily routine of this huge educational bureaucracy would be turned upside down with the arrival of hundreds of activists from the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST). She knew this would happen because several leaders of the MST had called her earlier that day to inform her that they were coming. Sara had worked closely with dozens of these activists over the past year, constructing a proposal for an educational program that would allow adults living in rural communities to finish fifth through eighth grade through accelerated night courses. This program would include many of the educational practices that MST activists had developed over the past two decades, such as, an emphasis on collective learning, small-farming, agro-ecological production, and an interdisciplinary curriculum.<sup>18</sup> The Secretary of Education of Pernambuco was supposed to begin financing this program—known as *Saberes da Terra* (Knowledges of the Land)—for thousands of adults throughout the state. However, everything was currently on hold because the public defender for the Secretary of Education had been delaying his authorization of the program for months. Activists from the MST were getting impatient, which is why they planned to occupy the Secretary of Education that day. They had informed Sara Lima—despite her status as a top-level appointee of a right-leaning government—because she had been working closely with the movement and activists believed in her commitment to the program. Sara represents what Fox (1992) refers to as an entrepreneurial reformist: a state actor with the “willingness and the capacity to initiate and pursue their own interests amid contending social forces” (p. 16).

A little before noon hundreds of MST activists arrived and entered the building, making large amounts of noise while setting up tents and equipment to camp out for the next few days. According to Sara, the other bureaucrats in the Secretary of Education were appalled, exclaiming, “Everything Sara did for the social movements, and look at what they are doing to her now!”<sup>19</sup> But Sara was not angry. After the MST arrived she went to the public defender and told him that MST activists were in the lobby and were refusing to leave unless he signed off on the educational program. She told him there was nothing she could do to stop the activists. By the end of the day, the public defender had approved the program. Sara remembers this series of events fondly: “My colleagues thought the social movements were ungrateful, but the MST’s mobilization helped me, we needed the extra pressure to push the program through.”<sup>20</sup> Later that year, at the inaugural ceremony for *Saberes da Terra*, dozens of MST activists were hired as the coordinators of this state-funded adult educational program.

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<sup>18</sup> The interdisciplinary curriculum included topics such as “Sustainable Development and Solidarity,” “Citizenship, Social Organization, and Public Policies,” “Economic Solidarity,” “Systems of Production and Process of Work in the Countryside,” and “Family Agriculture, Ethnicity, Culture, Identity, Gender, and Generation.” This program was called, *Projovem Campo – Saberes da Terra, Projeto Político-Pedagógica* (MEC, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Sara Lima, April 5, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Sara Lima April 5, 2011 (Sara was the Executive Secretary of Education of Pernambuco from 2003-2006, under Jarbas Vasconcelos from the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party-PMDB)

## **The State, Civil Society, and Social Movements**

The major theoretical question of this dissertation is how social movements successfully implement their goals within the bureaucratic state-apparatus, in this case, the Brazilian public educational system. As the opening vignette to this chapter illustrates, this is not always a simple process of social movements making demands on the state, and state actors implementing these demands. In this case Sara Lima is a high-ranking government official in a conservative administration actively working with the MST, and using the mobilization of the movement to push forward educational reforms. How do we understand state officials who work within the government while maintaining their allegiance to and following directions from a social movement? The MST activists, on the other hand, are not only pressuring the government for the implementation of an adult education program, but also becoming the implementers of this program as official state employees. How do we understand a social movement that mobilizes against the state to ensure the implementation of public goods, while also working within the state to facilitate their delivery? Finally, this “adult education program” is not a typical program, but rather, one that has been developed to encourage people to stay in the countryside and become farmer-intellectuals, in order to support the MST’s vision of sustainable rural communities of small-farmers and collective agricultural production. How do we theorize state services that directly contribute to the long-term sustainability and mobilization of a contentious social movement, whose goals are in direct conflict with state interests?

In the following sections, I analyze how state-society relations are understood in three different bodies of literature—the social movement/political process model, the literature on state-society synergy and participatory governance, and a Gramscian perspective. For each of these paradigms, I analyze how the relationship between the state, civil society, and social movements is understood. I argue that opposed to the social movement and state-society scholarship, a Gramscian perspective helps us theorize civil society as an ambiguous sphere that both protects the state and contains resistance. I find this perspective the most appropriate in analyzing the MST’s attempt to transform rural public schools across Brazil.

### ***Social Movements as Outside and in Opposition to the Polity***

The literature on social movements has burgeoned over the past four decades, contributing immensely to our understanding of the emergence and effectiveness of contentious protest. The relationship between the state and social movements is a central focus of this body of scholarship. In his classic book on social movement mobilization, Tilly (1978) takes a Weberian conception of the state and extends it to his definition of government as “an organization that controls the principal concentrated means of coercion within the population.” He introduces the notion of “polity” as the “collective action of the members of the government,” and he defines “members” as actors with “routine, low-cost access to resources controlled by the government” (Tilly, 1978, p. 53). The “polity” includes social groups with routine access to state resources. This definition became the starting point for defining social movements, which are collective groups *outside of this polity* engaging in non-routine actions to achieve their goals.

Tilly’s 1978 book has had an enormous influence on social movement theory. Consequently, within most of this literature state actors and social movement activists are clearly differentiated from each other—the former including the polity and the latter outside of the polity. By the early 1980s, Tilly’s approach to the study of contentious politics, along with McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) influential study, became popularized as the “resource mobilization” perspective. These scholars argued that instead of focusing on social psychology or the individual, scholars of social movements should highlight sociological theories of politics

and economics. McCarthy and Zald assume that there will always be enough discontent for a social movement to develop, and rather than discontent, the key factor in movement emergence is whether people can effectively organize the resources at their disposal to take collective political action. The resource mobilization approach “emphasizes the interaction between resource availability, the preexisting organization of preference structures, and entrepreneurial attempts to meet preference demand.” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1236). In 1982, McAdam came out with a groundbreaking book, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, which builds on and critiques the resource mobilization approach, proposing a new theoretical framework: the political process model. McAdam proposes a study of social movements through three interacting forces: political opportunity structures, indigenous networks, and cognitive liberation.<sup>21</sup>

The political process/resource mobilization approach to the study of social movements is a major paradigm in the U.S. social movement literature.<sup>22</sup> Within this scholarship, Tilly’s notion of a social movement as sustained collective action outside of the polity still dominates. For example, in the second edition of his book, McAdam (1999) continues to define social movements as “rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through non-institutionalized means” (McAdam, 1999, p. 37). While this distinction might be appropriate for analyzing how activists make demands on the state, it is less useful for examining the ways in which activists work both inside and outside of the state to institutionalize movement goals. This rigid line between the state and social movements does not help us understand the sets of relationship outlined in the opening vignette. In this story, social movement activists worked with state actors—members of the polity—to develop a new educational proposal; then the activists coordinated with these same bureaucrats to organize a contentious action that could put pressure on the Secretary of Education to implement their co-produced proposal. Once the proposal was implemented, activists became the coordinators of the state educational program, while also continuing to engage in contentious political actions to ensure the program received sufficient resources. These complex interactions illustrate that the line between members of the polity (state actors) and nonmembers (social movement activists) is often blurred.

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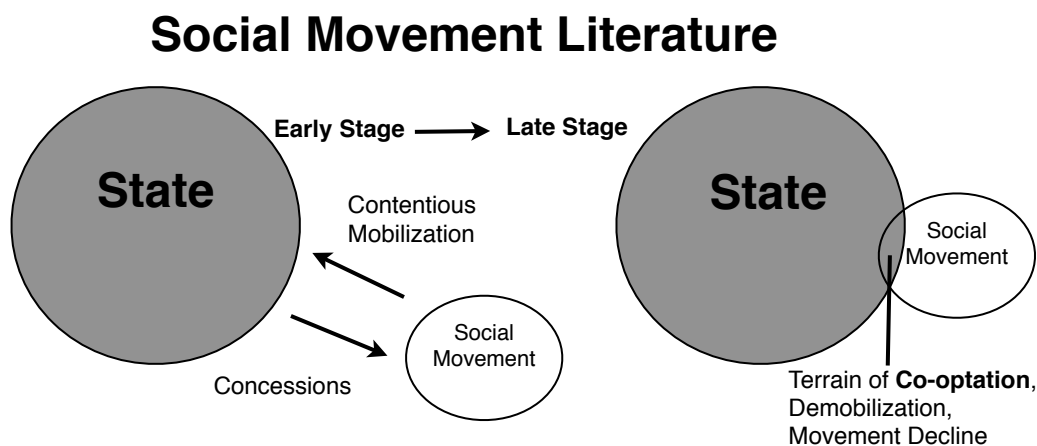
<sup>21</sup> In 1999, McAdam published a second addition of his book on the political process theory with a new preface wherein he outlines two of the same three conditions for social movement emergence: political opportunities and indigenous networks. However, his third condition—previously called cognitive liberation—is now referred to as “framing or other interpretive processes.”

<sup>22</sup> Despite its wide application, the political process/resource mobilization approach has also been vehemently critiqued, most directly by scholars associated with the “new social movement” tradition. These scholars question the concept of power within the political process model, which they say assumes that domination is organized around one primary source of power—the state—and that political and economic structures are primary and determining (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008, p. 3). Drawing on Foucault’s notion of power as dispersed throughout society, scholars in the new social movement tradition critique this definition, claiming that movements often have little to do with “politics” (i.e., contesting state power) and “instead, collective action concerns everyday life, personal relationships, and new conceptions of space and time” (Melucci, 1989, p. 71). Building on these interventions, Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) redefine social movements as collective actors that are, “challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part” (p. 19). This theoretical approach challenges many of the basic assumptions of the political process model, and suggests a new relationship between collective action and culture.



The dichotomy between social movements and the state in the social movement literature is partially a byproduct of the still prevalent notion that when social movements work within the state, they cease to be “real” movements. This idea can be traced back to Michels’ (1915) iron rule of oligarchy, and his argument that political parties tend to become more bureaucratic and hierarchical over time, thus suppressing grassroots mobilization. Piven and Cloward (1977) took up this idea five decades later, arguing that social movements are always more effective when engaging in disruptive activity, and that as soon as disruption declines activists lose their ability to effect change. They write, “Our conclusions are very similar to those reached by Robert Michels decades ago on the basis of his analysis of the organizational imperatives that accounted for the conservative tendencies of the German Social Democracy Party. The intellectual left has dealt with Michels largely by ignoring him. But the dilemmas to which he pointed persist” (xvi). Through four case studies of protest movements, Piven and Cloward illustrate that once social movements become more organized, adopt formal hierarchies, and begin working within the state, contentious actions become difficult to organize. Piven and Cloward argue that this prevents any more structural change from occurring, because elites will only give concessions to movements when forced to do so through disruption. Figure 2.1 illustrates how these relationships between the state and social movements are conceptualized in this social movement tradition.

*Figure 2.1: State-State Society Relations from a Social Movement Perspective*



There have been several scholars since Piven and Cloward who have critiqued the idea that the “iron rule of oligarchy” is every social movement’s destiny, or that working with state actors will necessarily lead to social movement decline (see Part II for a lengthy discussion on this issue). One example is Clemens (1993), who argues that some types of organizations may actually be resistant to the supposedly universal processes described by Michels, and that, “processes of conservative organizational transformation are conditioned by both the social identity of those organized and the character of existing political institutions” (p. 757). Voss and Sherman’s (2000) analysis of the labor movement has illustrated that social movements that become bureaucratic and conservative at one point in time can revitalize and assume radical goals at another moment. Martin (2008) makes a similar argument about labor unions, stating: “Movements do not automatically become institutionalized: they chose certain strategies based on specific environmental and internal considerations that may also reverse this process” (p.

1093). All of these studies point to the importance of analyzing institutional contexts—which shift overtime—when assessing movements’ resistance to or tendency towards conservatism.

Another scholar relevant to this discussion is Alvarez, whose extensive studies of the Latin American feminist movement (1990, 1999) illustrate that women’s organization can employ a “dual strategy” and effectively create institutional change by both engaging in contentious actions and working directly with policy makers.<sup>23</sup> Other scholars of women’s movements put forward similar arguments, illustrating that feminist organizations have successfully transformed the traditional gender ideologies of the state. Thus, even when groups become more formal and less contentious, they still secure the continuity of the feminist movement during periods of latency (Lebon, 1996). Furthermore, there is no hard rule in respect to the outcome of women’s organization engaging the state; rather, this process has brought “varieties of forms of absorption/translation that restrict and broaden, transform and commit treason, to the meaning and scope of feminist demands in legal and public policy struggle” (Santos, 2010, p. 167). More recently, Suh (2011) describes how the Korean Women’s movements successfully worked both inside and outside of the state to achieve its goals. She writes,

The relationship of social movements with the state does not need to be all the time contentious but can occasionally be cooperative. Movement activists and polity members can overlap, and the contested terrain of collective action is not always outside the polity. Entrenched in the polity, ‘insider activists’ function as interlocutors representing and channeling movement causes and demands to influence policymaking and legislation. These points may require revisiting or stretching the conventional conceptualizations of social movements as collective action employing disruptive tactics, contending state authority, and retaining outsider status from formal politics. (Suh, 2011, p. 464)

Suh’s emphasizes the blurred line that often exists between the polity and a social movement, and the fact that activists can work simultaneously with and against state actors in achieving their goals. Suh calls for a “revisiting or stretching” of the “conventional conceptualizations of social movements” as outside of formal politics. Nonetheless, despite these critiques, the notion that institutionalization signals the death of social movements is still a commonly held assumption in the social movement literature.<sup>24</sup>

The trajectory of social movements that engage in the institutional sphere—and how this affects the demands they are fighting for—is a central question of this dissertation. Although Tarrow wrote almost two decades ago that the outcome of social movements working within institutions is the biggest question for scholars of social movements today, his call has not been heeded. As already indicated, while there has been some critique of the Michels/Piven & Cloward thesis the primary focus in the social movement literature is still on movement

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<sup>23</sup> Although Alvarez has been cautious about the role of NGOs in the feminist movement (Alvarez, 1999), most recently she concluded that these NGOs play an important role in sustaining social movement activism overtime, and “there is, in short, no 21<sup>st</sup> century Iron law of NGO-ization” (Alvarez, 2009, p. 182).

<sup>24</sup> Rojas (2007) argues in his analysis of the rise of black studies programs in the U.S. in the 1960s: “Compared to the voluminous research on mobilization, the literature on outcomes has yet to mature to a comparable level” (p. 7). In contrast to this trend, Rojas focuses on how institutions can support movement’s achievements, *not* what activists do to sustain a movement. His analysis, however, primarily draws on organizational theory.

emergence, cycles of protest, repertoires of contention, and effective framing. Thus, I turn to the literature on embeddedness, coproduction, and participatory governance, to see if the conceptual tools these scholars provide offer a better language for understanding social movements who cross the state-society divide.

### ***Civil Society and the State as Synergistic***

In his book about participatory budgeting in Brazil, Baiocchi (2005) advocates for a “relational approach” to political sociology with three central concepts: state-civil society regimes, civic configurations, and civic practices. Baiocchi critiques traditional approaches in political sociology, arguing that:

Neither of the two main relevant traditions in sociology, the society-centered theory of democracy and the social movements approach, has a language for exposing relationships across society and the state . . . what is of concern here is its underlying assumption, that civil society is by definition autonomous and separate from the state. This creates two problems for discussion at hand; first it obscures spaces between the state and civil society (such as the OP [participatory budgeting]) as settings for civic action. Second and more fundamentally, it does not permit us to analyze the dynamic process of interaction across state and civil society that constrain and enable both state and civil society. (Baiocchi, 2005, p. 17)

For Baiocchi, the society-centered and state-centered approaches in political sociology are insufficient for analyzing the institutional spaces that are constructed *between* the state and civil society, or the dynamic interactions between state actors and civil society groups. Baiocchi goes on to say that social movement literature, “lacks an accounting of the processes by which social movements themselves can come to change the state” (2005, p. 18). I concur with Baiocchi that these shortcomings make it necessary to move beyond the social movement scholarship and draw on theories of state-society relations, which *do* offer a language for analyzing how activists may cross this public-private divide.

Over the past two decades there has been an outpouring of studies of state-society relations,<sup>25</sup> which discuss the conditions wherein civil society participation in state institutions is possible and effective. This literature rejects the assumption that there is always an antagonistic relationship between social movements and the state, or that effective political action is comprised of oppositional activities and cycles of contention (Williams, 2008). Instead, scholars emphasize the importance of civil society not only making demands, but also becoming legitimate actors in all stages of the policy process. This perspective is critical for analyzing the MST’s educational initiatives. For example, in 1996 the MST organized a campaign to train more than seven thousand people as literacy educators. After the first year, the chancellor of Brasilia University, João Todorov, stated that the MST had “done more for rural education than government programmes in the previous 500 years” (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 119). The program was expanded as a joint project between the MST and the Ministry of Education. This example shows that the MST’s educational initiatives are not always developed through an antagonistic relationship with the Brazilian state.

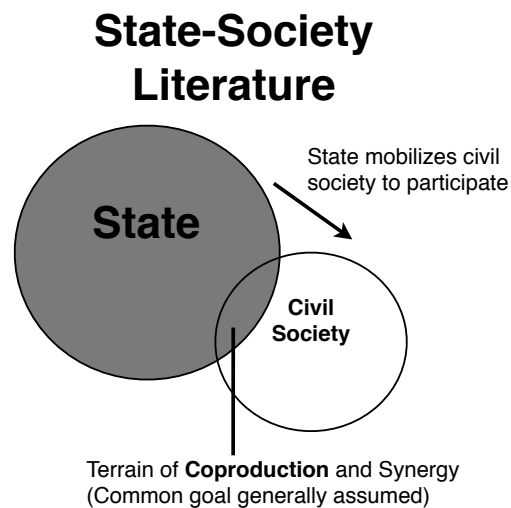
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<sup>25</sup> For example, see: (Abers & Keck, 2009; Baiocchi, Heller, & Silva, 2008; Evans, 1996, 1997; Fung & Wright, 2003; Goldfrank, 2011; Heller, 1999; Hochstetler & Keck, 2007; Houtzager, 1998, 2001; Keck, 1992; Sandbrook, Edelman, Heller, & Teichman, 2007; Wampler, 2007)

Evans (1995) originally referred to the mutually reinforcing relationship between the state and civil society as “embedded autonomy”: the state has autonomy from elite interests, while also maintaining a web of connections with civil society actors. Although Evans used the term “embedded autonomy” to describe the relationship between state actors and industrial entrepreneurs, since the 1990s scholars have expanded the concept to explore other moments of collaboration between civil society and the state, arguing that there are positive impacts in the “coproduction of decisions and services” (Ostrom, 1996).<sup>26</sup>

Joshi and Moore (2004) draw on Ostrom’s (1996) definition of coproduction and offer the concept of institutionalized coproduction: “The provision of public services (broadly defined, to include regulation) through regular, long-term relationships between state agencies and organized groups of citizens” (Joshi & Moore, 2004, p. 31). The concept of institutionalized coproduction—and the idea that public services are provided through regular, long-term relationships between the state and organized groups of citizens—offers a useful framework for analyzing the MST’s initiatives in public schools. The government still provides the basic bureaucratic apparatus of the school system—teachers, books, and a curriculum—while groups of MST activists provide other resources such as developing teacher trainings, cultivating community-school connections, organizing student collectives, and addressing teacher concerns. Figure 2.2 illustrates these relationship between civil society and the state in this perspective.

*Figure 2.2: State-Society Relations from a Social Movement Perspective*



This state-society framework is a vast improvement over the social movement literature, which as Baiocchi (2005) says, does not offer a language for analyzing state-society collaboration. However, there are several drawbacks to these studies. The first limitation concerns one of the conditions for developing coproduction—a mobilized and active civil society—and its unique implications for the MST. Rather than state actors implementing mechanisms that activate civil society, in my research it is the MST that mobilizes civil society.

<sup>26</sup> Other scholars have referred to this as “state-society synergy” (Evans, 1996, 1997; Lemos & Looye, 2003; Wang, 1999), “participatory governance” (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2005; Goldfrank, 2011; Wampler, 2007), or activist “throughput” in the policy process (Abers & Keck, 2009).

In other words, MST activists are the ones engaging teachers, bureaucrats, community members, and students in a participatory process of defining educational goals. The MST's educational initiatives offer a different angle on participation, as it involves a well-organized, national movement that is seeking to influence an arm of the state, in the absence of an official participatory forum. While the majority of studies of participatory governance examine the state's attempt to promote participation (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, Heller, & Silva, 2008; Baiocchi, 2005), the focus of this dissertation is on social movement's ability to *force the state* to allow activists to engage in the implementation of particular educational goals.

A second drawback of this state-society literature is that a "common goal" is often assumed to exist between the state and civil society (such as the construction of urban infrastructure). In the case of the MST, complementarity educational goals are sometimes present—as the statement from the University of Brasília's chancellor indicates. However, there are also many cases in which the educational goals of the MST are in direct conflict with the government's vision of quality education. In order to overcome these tensions, I draw on a Gramscian approach to state-society relations, in order to theorize the ambiguous and ambivalent nature of civil society in relationship to the state.

### ***Civil Society as Part of the State and a Terrain of Resistance***

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was a Marxist theorist who sought to create a theory of the state that went beyond the traditional vision of the state apparatus as a unitary class subject; instead he analyzed state power as a complex of social relations (Jessop, 2001). For Gramsci the state is not just oppressive but also ethical, as one of the most important roles for the state is to exercise moral and intellectual leadership: "A social group can and, indeed, must already be a leader before conquering government power . . . even if it has firm control, it becomes dominant, but it must also continue to be a 'leader'" (Gramsci quoted in Santucci, 2010, p. 154). In this perspective, the state is not simply an entity that possesses a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force (Weber, 1919)<sup>27</sup> that can be seized. Rather, the state should be understood as an "integral state," both including and forming civil society institutions.

Hegemony is the central concept Gramsci uses to analyze how a particular social group maintains state power. Hegemony is always rooted in the dominant economic mode of production, but it is characterized as an expansion beyond the economic class interest into the sphere of politics. The determining factor of hegemony is "intellectual and moral direction . . . the need to gain 'consent' even before the material conquest of power" (Santucci, 2010, p. 155). Riley (2010) refers to hegemony as the political and cultural dimension of class formation (p. 4). De Leon and colleagues (2009) refer to hegemony as the active participation of the broadest strata in the making of their subordination through the naturalization of social differences (p. 199). However, hegemony is not only about consent. The state exercises hegemony through both moral leadership and "an armour of coercion" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 263). In other words, although cultivating intellectual and moral leadership is critical to maintaining hegemony, the overt use of physical force to repress opposition is also a central tool. Gramsci clearly realized the role of coercion in suppressing opposition, as he was writing from the inside of a jail in Italy.

The concept of hegemony is at its heart a critique of economism—the idea that politics and ideology can be read off the economic sphere—or privileging the base in the base-superstructure couplet. Gramsci writes that there is a false distinction between the state and civil

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<sup>27</sup> Webers's definition of the state is in general used by both social movement theorists and the scholars of state-society relations overviewed in this chapter.

society, which is promoted by the ideology of liberal laissez-faire economics. He writes, “but since in actual reality civil society and the state are one and the same, it must be made clear that laissez-faire too is a form of state ‘regulation,’ introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means” (Gramsci, 2000, p. 210). Gramsci argues that it is necessary to combat the notion of economism—both in the Marxist sense of the superstructure being determined by the base, and in the liberal economic vision of the economy as a separate and autonomous sphere. He promotes the “practice of politics,” which he says must be carried on by further developing the concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 2000, p. 216). In saying this, Gramsci elevates the study of ideology; Althusser and others later follow in this tradition.

Another important contribution Gramsci makes is his conception of civil society. Gramsci writes that there are two levels of the “superstructure”: civil society, or the ensemble of organisms commonly called private; and political society, or the State. He writes:

The superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern warfare. In war it would sometimes happen that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy’s entire defensive system, where as in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter; and that the moment of their advance and attack the assailants would find themselves confronted by a line of defense which was still effective. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 235)

For Gramsci, civil society—the trenches of modern warfare—is in fact part of the state, if understood in its *integral* form: “State = political society + civil society” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 263). However, civil society also has a contradictory relationship to the state. As Burawoy (2003) points out: “Civil society collaborates with the state to contain class struggle, and on the other hand, its autonomy from the state can promote class struggle” (p. 198). In this reading, civil society always has a degree of autonomy from the state, and thus, can be the terrain on which resistance is organized. It is simultaneously a space of contestation where different social organizations form, and an arena of associational activity where daily life is experienced (Tugal, 2009). The institutional makeup of civil society includes but is not limited to political parties, print media, social movements, NGOs, the family, and mass education (Burawoy, 2003, p. 198). Therefore, in this framework public schools are both a part of Gramsci’s integral state—protecting the state from a frontal attack during revolutionary moments—and a site to organize resistance against state hegemony.

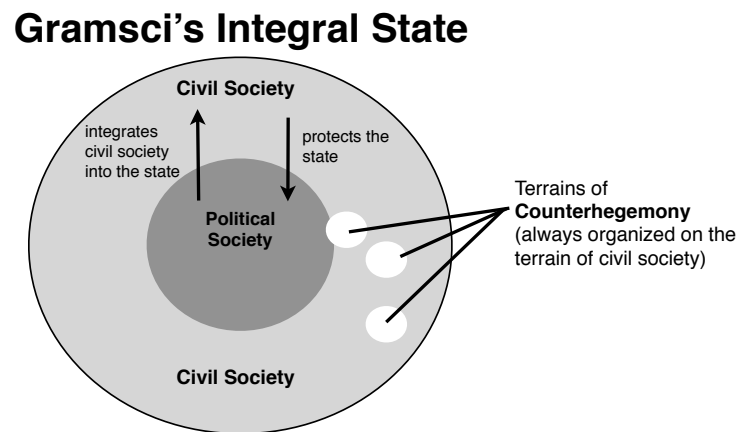
While Gramsci (2000) never refers to the term “counter-hegemony,” he does discuss “a struggle of political ‘hegemonies,’” and the ability to “destroy one hegemony and create another” (p. 196). He also refers to the potential of “the working class to challenge that existing order, and become hegemonic” (p. 300). The term “counter-hegemony,” while not originally a Gramscian term, is a commonly used phrase to represent the sentiment of destroying one hegemony and creating another hegemony. Riley (2010) writes that,

To the extent that a class is hegemonic, it does not rule directly as a class. Instead, the class rules in the name of a broader national interest, which more or less corresponds to its particular corporate interests. Since there is always a gap between the particular interests of the dominant class and the broader interests through which it establishes its claim to rule, this interest can become a point of reference for nonelites who can articulate their interests as better corresponding to it. The gap between class interest and national interest is therefore crucial for the development of counterhegemony. (p. 16)

In other words, a *successful* hegemonic bloc is necessarily based on a gap between the interest of the dominant class and the national interest, which counter hegemonic movements can take advantage of. It is only when a dominant economic elite holds power *without establishing hegemony* that this gap does not exist, and therefore, there is no room for counter-hegemonic struggle. However, if this latter situation develops, this leads to a “self-reinforcing cycle of political decay or organic crisis” (Riley, 2010, p. 16).

Following Riley, I employ the term counter-hegemony to refer to the gap between the particular interests of the dominant class and the broader interests through which it establishes its rules—the gap between class interest and national interest. The MST’s attempt to institute an alternative economic model in the countryside takes place within this gap, on the terrain of civil society. Figure 2.3 illustrates these state-society relations.

Figure 2.3: State-Society Relations from a Gramscian Perspective



### Theorizing Political Struggle

For Gramsci, there are the two types of political struggles that are waged in the terrain of civil society: wars of position and wars of movement. A war of movement refers to direct attempts to contest state power through occupations, strikes, and other political actions. The war of position, on the other hand, is the “art of politics” in the “trenches” of civil society (Gramsci, 2000, p. 233). These wars of position are critical because, as Gramsci writes, every revolution, “has been preceded by an intensive labor of criticism, the spread of ideas among masses of men who are at first resistant” (Gramsci, 2000, p. 58). An example of this was the Enlightenment, which preceded the French Revolution. Gramsci writes that the same phenomena is being repeated in the case of socialism, where a unified consciousness of the proletariat is still being formed through a critique of capitalism (Gramsci, 2000, p. 59). In countries where a “civil society” is not well developed, such as Russia before the Bolshevik revolution, a war of maneuver is immediately possible. However, in societies such as Italy where there are complex sets of civil society organizations, it is the war of position—which “demands enormous sacrifices by infinite masses of people” (Gramsci, 2000, p. 230)—that brings about the unified consciousness necessary for an eventual war of maneuver to take place.

One of the central actors in a war of position is the “organic intellectual,” who is the “organiser of masses of men (*sic*)” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 5). In order to create a new stratum of

intellectuals it is necessary to elaborate the intellectual activity that exists in everyone, to develop the kernel of good sense that exists within “common sense.” Common sense is the “ambiguous, contradictory, and multifaceted” (Gramsci, quoted in Santucci, 2010, p. 139) folklore of the people. “Common man thinks that the many cannot go wrong . . . even if he himself, in truth, is incapable of sustaining and articulating his own opinions . . . he is certain that there is in his group someone who knows how to do it . . . he remembers having heard the reasons for his faith expounded widely and coherently, such that he has remained convinced” (Gramsci, quoted in Santucci, 2010, p. 140). This quote illustrates how common sense is contradictory, yet also contains a powerful and persistent vision of the world. Furthermore, within common sense there is always a kernel of good sense. It is the organic intellectual that engages in a “philosophy of praxis” by working with, in, and through this common sense to further develop that kernel of good sense (Gramsci, 2000, p. 5). Unlike intellectuals that are identified by their professional status, an organic intellectual is identified not by her or his profession, but by organic membership in a social class. As Gramsci (1971) famously writes, “All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (p. 9).

As Gramscian scholars make clear, the philosophy of praxis is *not* a process of indoctrination or imposition. “A philosophy of praxis . . . must be a criticism of ‘common sense’, basing itself initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that ‘everyone’ is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone’s individual life, but of renovating and making ‘critical’ an already existing activity” (Gramsci 1971, p. 330-331). Hart (2013) describes this as the collective practices and processes through which “fragmentary common sense becomes coherent, enabling new critical understandings and actions” (p. 308). Green and Ives (2010) argue that this is not an imposition of a more “rational” or “logical” world view, but rather, a deep engagement with the “fragments that make up subaltern historical, social, economic and political conditions” (p. 307).<sup>28</sup> Thomas also emphasizes that this “philosophy of praxis” is not an instrument to gain consent and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; it is the *subaltern classes* who want to educate themselves and are interested in knowing all truths (Thomas, 2009, p. 452).

The MST’s attempt to link civil society to an alternative hegemonic bloc occurs through a slow process of garnering consent among rural populations, as well as moments of mobilization and contestation against the state. The role of the organic intellectual, however, is not only to sway minds, but also to participate in practical and material life as an organizer—developing new housing projects, helping communities achieve access to roads and technical assistance, and developing new pedagogies for local schools. Also importantly, the organic intellectual comes from the stratum of the class she or he is organizing. The MST’s attempts to organize settlements collectively, convince teachers to support the movement’s educational project, and organize cultural events for children on settlements, are all part of this war of position.<sup>29</sup> The efforts to occupy land, organize protests, participate in occupations, and other direct, contentious actions that force the government to concede to demands, are part of the MST’s war of movement.

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<sup>28</sup> They describe this perspective as a productive alternative to the “fragmentation” celebrated in both liberal multiculturalism and uncritical postmodernism. (Green & Ives, 2010, p. 306)

<sup>29</sup> Williams (2008) also makes the distinction between protest politics—which elicit people in mass mobilizations—and generative politics that are “about the innovation in collective action that seeks to engender new political actors, organizations and institutions” (p. 9).



### *Defining a Social Movement*

In Wolford's (2010b) recent book, *The Land is Ours Now*, she also draws on Gramsci to analyze the MST. She describes the MST's war of position as "the more subtle war of negotiation to win positions of power, create alliances, and construct new revolutionary political subjectivities" (p. 9). One of her major contributions in this book is "to illustrate the ongoing war of position conducted by and within the MST," which will "determine whether, when and how other wars of maneuver will be led by the movement" (p. 9). Consequently, Wolford (2010b) focuses her ethnographic research on the "banal geographies of resistance," (p. 6) in an attempt to understand how the "customs, culture, and context," or "moral economies" of rural groups affect their definitions of justice and shifting loyalties to the movement (p. 7). Wolford (2010b) argues that movements should be seen as "competing discourses negotiating for the rights and ability to define who will represent the poor and how" (p. 10). This definition is a radical break from the political process approach.

I have found Wolford's definition of social movements to resonate with the everyday MST reality I observed during fieldwork. However, unlike Wolford, I am *not* researching the "banal geographies of resistance," but rather, the revolutionary strategy of a group of traditional and organic intellectuals engaged in both wars of position and wars of movement in the Brazilian countryside. My empirical research is based on interviewing and observing the lives of the hundreds of MST activists who participate in daily MST activities, are members of MST collectives, study in the courses offered by the movement, and attend regional, state and national leadership meetings. Among these activists, the similarities in discourses and daily practices are impressive, especially given their diverse cultural and regional backgrounds. No matter where I was in Brazil, when I was with active MST participants I knew I could expect similar discourses, rituals, political rhetoric, and Saturday-evening festivities.

Given the focus of my study on the MST's regional, state, and national leadership—and their relationship to both state actors and communities living in settlements—I offer a slightly different framework than Wolford for conceptualizing the one million people who MST activists claim make up their movement. Also drawing on Gramsci, I argue that these one million people—and their various associations, organizations, and every day practices—should be considered part of the "civil society" of areas of agrarian reform. In contrast, the leadership of the MST (which of course, is always shifting) should be described as the MST's "political society," which has the same function as Gramsci's political party.

Gramsci writes: "The essential task of our party is to take over the reins of the majority of the working class; the transitional phase we are going through is not a direct struggle for power but a preparatory stage . . . in other words a phase of agitation, propaganda and organizing" (Gramsci, quoted in Santucci, 2010, p. 97). Gramsci describes a political party as the "collective intellectual," and considers the party the main instrument for the transformation necessary to construct a new hegemonic system (Santucci, 2010, p. 156). The MST leadership is similar to this "collective intellectual"—attempting to work with and through people's common sense to give them a "homogeneity and an awareness" of their own function, and organize them to contest state power. The ability for the MST leadership to garner the consent of people living in areas of agrarian reform for an alternative hegemonic project varies across the country.

In describing the MST leadership as the "MST political society," I build on and expand previous scholarship that has used the term "political society" to describe the domain that links civil society to the state (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Tugal, 2009). This is in contrast to Gramsci,

whose definition of “political society” is interchangeable with the “state.” I follow Tugal’s (2009) definition of the term political society, which I quote below at length:

I redefine ‘political society’ as the sphere where society organizes to shape state policies but also to define the nature of the state and political unity. At the local level, political society includes the elected municipality, parties, and other political groups, leadership, and local elections, as well as local official authority figures such as teachers (when and if they link society and the state) . . . political society is the set of organizations (mainly political parties and other sociopolitical movement organizations) that form, control and regulates (1) local and extra-local leadership and authority figures and (2) imagined political bodies, belongings, and collectivities, which together constitute people’s experience and contact with the political. Political society is what integrates people into the state and makes them citizens . . . its magic rod is the leadership it offers civil society. This leadership articulates various experiences of society into a hegemonic project. Weaving together three aspects of social life—everyday routine, the use of space, and economic experience—is the major challenge awaiting the leadership. (p. 25)

Although the focus of Tugal’s study is on an actual political party, his definition of political society clearly includes the MST as a “sociopolitical movement organization,” which regulates local leadership and forms imagined political bodies, belongings, and collectivities.

The MST leadership takes on the role of a Gramscian political party, as it organizes the every day routines, spatial relations, and economic experiences of families living on settlements. In moments of MST success, members of civil society might agree to participate in collective agricultural production, political protests, MST teacher trainings, and regional youth and gender collectives. At other moments, these civil society groups may dissociate from the MST, or even mobilize against the movement’s presence in settlements. The key point here is that civil society’s link to the MST’s alternative hegemonic project must always be produced, and reproduced, through people’s everyday experiences. This process is a constant dispute of power against other groups fighting to win this moral leadership from these rural populations. In the Brazilian countryside, these other groups may include local politicians, rural unions, or Evangelical and Catholic Churches. Understanding shifting identities and flows of people through and out of the movement has to be understood within this complex social fabric. Being able to theorize these flows of people through and out of the movement—and their relationship to an alternative hegemonic project—is where a Gramscian perspective becomes more effective than the social movement and state-society scholarship.

## **Public Schools Across Theoretical Perspectives**

### ***Public Schools in the Social Movement Perspective***

Is it possible for social movements to incorporate pedagogies that support alternative economic and class projects into the public school system, before taking state power? From a social movement perspective, the answer to this question is probably not. If social movements are understood as outside of the state, and public schools are state institutions, then public schools can only possibly contribute to the reproduction of state power.

For decades, theorists of social reproduction in education have analyzed schools from this perspective, examining how schools function in the interest of the dominant economic class (Althusser, 1984; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). One of the first scholars to directly analyze the role of

education in social reproduction was the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, who divided the State Apparatus into two parts: the repressive State apparatus (RSA) and the ideological State apparatus (ISA). The RSA includes the government, administration, army, police, courts and prisons, while the ISA encompasses religion, systems of public and private schools, the family, media, and culture. Althusser argues that no state can hold power for an extended period of time without exercising control over ISAs (Althusser, 1984, p. 20). Althusser also argues that in mature capitalist societies it is the *educational apparatus* (replacing the Church) that becomes the most important apparatus for reproducing capitalist relations of production through ideology.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) also contribute to theories of social reproduction in education by illustrating how the values, norms, and skills taught in schools *corresponded* to those existing in the capitalist workforce. Through “pluralist accommodation” there is a tendency for teachers—especially in periods of economic change—to alter educational values and goals in directions that conform to the new economic rationality and emerging social relations of production (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 237). For example, parents concerned with their children’s economic future will support a vocational education tailored to emerging markets. Similarly, Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) foundational work discusses schools as sites of social reproduction by introducing the idea of “cultural capital”: the field of rules, relationships, linguistic and cultural competencies that proclaims itself as objective while representing the values of dominant classes. For Bourdieu and Passeron, culture is the mediating link between ruling-class interests and everyday life. Through their appearance as impartial and neutral public schools are able to sort students based on their cultural capital. This process is hidden under what appears to be a natural selection process.

Another theorist of cultural production, Willis (1981), contests the unidirectional and one-sided treatment of ideology and culture in Bourdieu’s work (p. 54). In contrast, Willis (1977) focuses on understanding the cultural production of a group of rebellious youth—the lads—in a school in England. Willis shows how the lived cultural production of the working class is also a form of creative resistance and agency. These youth are acutely aware that the dominant culture in the school is not *their* culture, and they are engaged in a daily rebellion against school authority, through which they create a counter-culture within the school. Although this counter-culture eventually contributes to the lads’ willingness to enter the workforce as working-class men, Willis argues that this correspondence and social reproduction was never inevitable. Willis theorizes resistance by focusing on the limited penetration of the dominant ideology and contested process of cultural production among working class students. However, despite these moments of resistance, schools still function to reproduce the same class structures.

Together, these theories provide a convincing argument about the processes through which schools maintain capitalist relations of production. From the social reproduction perspective, public schools are in direct tension with radical political aims. This is why educational scholars like Illich (2001) called for a type of de-schooling that could facilitate a more genuine form of learning.<sup>30</sup> Others educational scholars writing from both socialist and anarchist perspectives have questioned the entire legitimacy of state schooling (Goodman, 1964; Kozol, 1991).<sup>31</sup> None of these scholars outright reject the importance of education; rather, they theorize *where* truly emancipatory educational practices actually take place—most likely, they conclude, outside of the public school sphere. These scholars embrace examples of radical education outside of the formal public school system, such as popular education in Brazil, the

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<sup>30</sup> (Illich, 2001)

<sup>31</sup> (Goodman, 1964; Kozol, 1991)

Highlander Center in Tennessee, labor colleges, and the Black Panther schools. These theories of social reproduction align with the social movement perspective, whereby education may be important for social transformation but public schools are not (see Diagram 2.4).

### ***Public Schools in the State-Society Perspective***

In contrast to the social movement perspective, state-society scholars analyze how civil society groups “cross the great divide” (Ostrom, 1996) in order to participate in public institutions. How should we understand the role of participatory governance within public schools from this perspective? As institutions that are embedded in communities—with continual and constant interactions between state actors (principals, teachers, local offices) and civil society groups (parents, parent-teacher associations, local lobby groups, NGOs)—public schools should be a primary location for analyzing participatory governance.

In one of the few discussions of participatory school governance in this literature, Fung (2001, 2004) examines the creation of Local School Councils in Chicago. He describes them as examples of “empowered participatory governance,” where parents are able to participate in the micro-governance of public schools, deliberate on decisions, and affect public action. Fung argues that the central government was critical in offering community members the necessary training to become engaged participants in the public sphere. He argues that, “contrary to skeptical expectations that reforms demanding active participation will further disadvantage less well-off areas, residents of poor neighborhoods participate at rates equal to or greater than those from wealth ones” (p. 93). Thus, local school councils directly facilitated the empowerment of poor people to participate in school decision-making across Chicago.

In direct contrast to this analysis, Shipps (2006) has analyzed these same reforms as corporate-led devolution of state power. She argues that these reforms took place through an unusual alliance between corporate interests and Latino community activists in Chicago, with much more emphasis on managerial efficiency than community empowerment. She writes that,

All of this school reform activity coalesced around the rhetoric of reform through decentralization. Definitions of the term ranged from community control that implied the inclusion of minorities, to administrative decentralization aimed at empowering principals, to the bottom-line accountability of treating parents as customers. The details of each group’s vision held different implications for school equity, quality, and efficiency; yet by adopting a common rhetoric each could hope to garner political allies and increase its influence. Thus, each heard in decentralization arguments of the others a confirmation of its won desires. (Shipps, 2006, p. 106)

As this excerpt makes clear, the two approaches to decentralization, both as populist democratic governance and as devolved authority by managerial discretion (Shipps, 1997), are theoretically irreconcilable yet sometimes indistinguishable in practice. The state-society literature falls short of offering a framework for distinguishing between these different forms of participation.

How can we reconcile the pitfalls of decentralization as implemented with the demand for “democratic schools” (Apple & Beane, 2007), in which teachers, students and communities are supposed to be the driving force in bottom-up educational change? As Fine (1993) argues, educational bureaucrats invite parents into schools as if it were a power-neutral partnership, yet most often parents are granted the space to voice their opinion without having the resources to implement alternative educational goals. Lipman (2011) notes that neoliberal visions of participation often take the form of appointed advisory boards with no decision-making power,

and public hearings where parents air grievances but real decisions are made elsewhere. Moreover, this kind of local participation can erode a larger concern for equity among schools (Shipps, 2006). Both approaches can have deleterious effects on low-income populations (Lipman, 2004).

Despite the fact that marginalized groups are often the most harmed by the implementation of free market liberal reforms,<sup>32</sup> calls for the devolution of state power are often carried out in their name. Simultaneously, marginalized groups are demanding a voice in state decision-making bodies. Distinguishing between reforms that allow grassroots groups to have real political power, versus reforms that decentralize power to adhere to free market ideologies, is increasingly difficult. Although a state-society framework can help us understand how “empowered participatory regimes” (Fung & Wright, 2003) develop in schools, there is still an uncomfortable tension in this literature about what this participation actually means for transforming economic and social relations outside of the school walls (see Diagram 2.4).

### ***Public Schools in a Gramscian Perspective***

I argue that Gramsci provides a solution to both the structural determinism in the social movement and social reproduction literatures, and the tensions between neoliberal devolution and empowered participatory governance in the state-society paradigm. Rather than being contradictory notion, in a theory of hegemonic politics neoliberal devolution represents an *opportunity* to implement a counter-hegemonic project, which activists must take advantage of strategically. The fact that the state’s neoliberal proposals and the MST’s counter hegemonic practices overlap in the sphere of “civil society participation” is not contradictory, but expected. The question is: Does the participation of civil society in these spaces actually promote an alternative hegemony, rather than legitimize the moral leadership of the current hegemon?

By drawing on a Gramscian framework, I advocate for a theoretical understanding of public schools as *terrains of dispute*, within which both repressive and liberatory educational practices are taking place. The MST activists themselves implicitly advocate for this perspective, as Rubneuz Leandro, and MST activist from the state of Pernambuco, illustrates with her reflections on the nature of schooling:

Education is always connected to the maintenance of the economic model. In this sense, schools in our society are capitalist schools, because the system needs this ideological tool to support itself. Whatever struggle against this economic model, whatever type of counter-hegemonic work, is also going to need education, and it has to be constructed within this hegemonic space. To dispute hegemony you have to fight within it for other principles.<sup>33</sup>

In this quote, Rubneuz discusses ideas such as hegemony, counter-hegemony, and the ability for grassroots organizations to define new, anti-capitalist principles in the public school system. Rubneuz concurs that schools generally function to promote and sustain the capitalist economy, corroborating the arguments of the social reproduction scholars mentioned above. However, she asserts, counter-hegemonic movements against capitalism should also attempt to use public

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<sup>32</sup> This point has been well-developed by many scholars, from Polanyi’s (2001) analysis of the liberal creed throughout the 19th century, to more recent scholars of neoliberalism (Chang, 2007; Hart, 2002; Harvey, 2005)

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Rubneuz Leandro, July 22, 2011.

schools to promote alternative socialist economies.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to theories of social and cultural reproduction, there is also a body of educational scholarship that investigates the transformational potential of public schooling, often referred to as critical pedagogy. The MST's educational project has its roots in some of these educational theories, most importantly the ideas that Freire (2002) developed in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's work is both a critique of the way schools reinforce systems of oppression, and a theory of how education can become a force for the collective struggle against these inequalities. Critical pedagogy in the United States grew out of scholars' engagement with Freire's work, which offered a concrete pedagogy that students and teachers could potentially use to contest social reproduction in schools. Critical Pedagogy is also linked to the field of critical theory, the Frankfurt School, and the search for a theory of social transformation and emancipation (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Giroux, 2001).<sup>35</sup> Critical pedagogy scholarship scrutinizes how hidden ideologies embedded in education normalize the hegemonic culture (Apple, 2004; Macedo, 2006) and reinforce social, racial and economic hierarchies (McLaren, 2003; Valenzeula, 1999), while also maintaining a "Freirean optimism" by analyzing how educational practices can enhance students' ability for critical reflection and make them agents of change (Giroux, 2001; hooks, 1994). More specifically, the field of critical pedagogy draws on critical theories to develop educational practices that can cultivate students' intellectual capacity to analyze and interpret their political, economic, and social realities.

Critical pedagogy is both a critique of the current public educational system, and an attempt to theorize how to construct a more emancipatory educational model. McLaren (2003) writes that, "Critical pedagogy attempts to provide teachers and researchers with a better means of understanding the role that schools actually play within a race-, class-, and gender-divided society, and . . . [is] dedicated to the emancipatory imperatives of self-empowerment and social transformation" (p. 189). Giroux (2001), one the leading theorists on resistance in education, also suggests that public schools can play an active role in struggles for social change. He asserts that the purpose of schooling is to create a public sphere that becomes a "lens for analyzing the de-politicization of the masses in contemporary society as well as their possible self-transformation toward a conscious and active citizenry" (116). He argues that the purpose of theory is to help people act more strategically in a way that will change unequal economic and political circumstances, and to give them a vocabulary to articulate concepts such as social transformation and agency. Giroux writes that while it is important to look at issues of social reproduction, it is also essential to theorize spaces for collective agency in public schools.

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<sup>34</sup> It is also important to point out that while MST activists are attempting to organize a counter-hegemonic movement in the countryside, this construction of counter-hegemony never exists in isolation from hegemonic practices and ideologies. As Willis (1977) reminds us, students "are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation and a partial penetration of those structures" (p. 175). This partial penetration and contestation occurs despite the particular ideological perspective organizing the schools. For example, while MST activists promote rural culture in public schools—including traditional dance and music—MST youth continue to listen to hip-hop, dress in urban clothing, and discuss their dreams to live in the cities. The same way students may resist the reproduction of capitalist relations in traditional schools (Willis, 1977), students living on agrarian reform settlements and camps often resist MST activists' attempt to use public schools to reproduce their own movement.

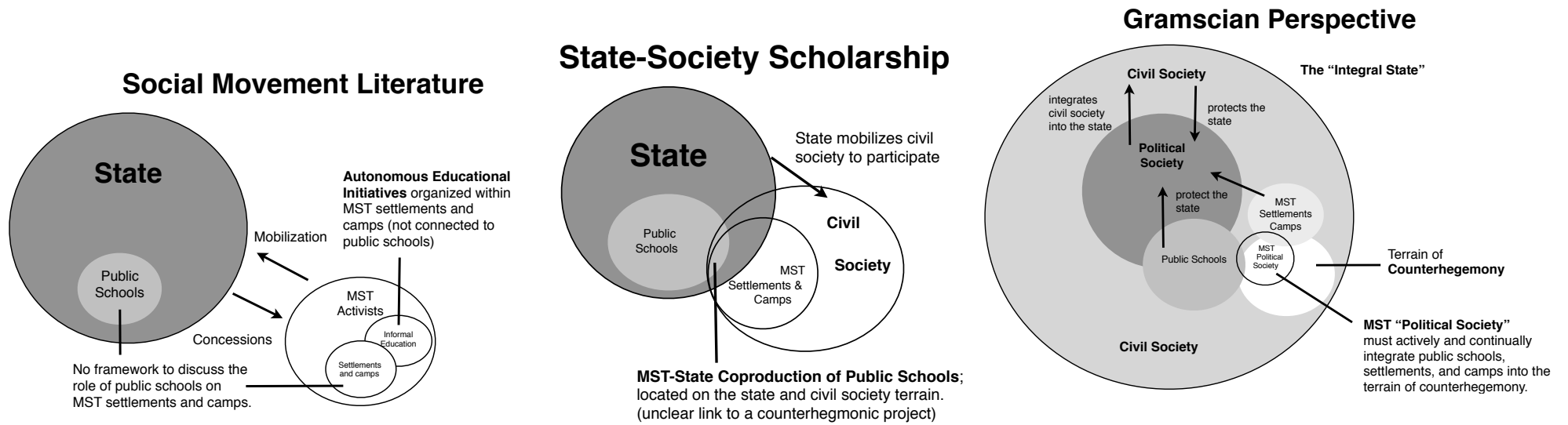
<sup>35</sup> Henry Giroux claims in an interview that he first started using the term during informal conversations with Donaldo Macedo and Paulo Freire in the early 1980s (Giroux, 2008).

More recently, Apple (2013) has also explored the role of schools and social change, by asking *if* education can actually change society. He analyzes several historical figures that have theorized how educational institutions can contribute to social transformation, from Paulo Freire to George Count, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Carter G. Woodson. He also offers several concrete examples of how grassroots movements—on both the right and the left—have used educational institutions for political, economic, and cultural ends. He writes that, “In certain situations and at certain times, educational institutions can and do become crucial sites for an participate in ‘changing society.’ They can and do act as arenas for envisioning new possibilities” (Apple, 2013, p. 163). However—and Apple is painstakingly clear on this point—the development of these alternative educational models “is best done when it is dialectically and intimately connected to actual movements and struggles” (Apple, 2013, p. 41).

In other words, it is most often social movements that are pushing leaders to the forefront of controversial issues, and it is also these social movements that are developing educational pedagogies to support their visions. Nonetheless, Apple (2006) argues that there are few empirical examples of how counterhegemonic goals have actually transformed the ideological conditions surrounding schools. In taking a Gramscian perspective to schools as terrains of contestation—and analyzing how a social movement attempts to transform public schools in diverse regional contexts—I am attempting to fill this gap in the literature on critical pedagogy and public schooling.

Figure 2.4 is a comparative illustration of the relationship between public schools, MST settlements and camps, and the state in each of these three theoretical perspectives.

Figure 2.4: Relationship between Public Schools, Settlements, Camps, and the State in Three Different Theoretical Perspectives.





In the illustration on the left, which depicts the social movement paradigm, public schools are located within the state and both MST settlements and camps are in the terrain of civil society. In this framework, MST activists can organize radical educational initiatives in their settlements and camps, but these are autonomous from the state. In other words, there is no language to discuss the possibility that social movements may also utilize public schools to support their political goals; these schools simply represent institutions that reproduce the same economic and social relations in society.

The center illustration offers a more complex picture, with the state and civil society overlapping. Although the majority of public schools are within the state, there are some that also enter into the state-society sphere. I have described this as the sphere of “participatory school governance,” which Fung (2004) has called an empowered participatory regime. However, as Figure 2.4 illustrates, the relationship between these spaces of participatory school governance, neoliberal devolution, and actual empowerment that transforms unequal social and economic relations is unclear. In contrast to the public schools in this diagram, MST settlements and camps are located within the civil society terrain; however, they also overlap with the state, allowing for the possibility for these communities’ participation in state institutions.

The third illustration, depicting the Gramscian perspective, is the most complex. In this picture civil society is part and parcel of the state, protecting it from a frontal attack. Political society, which Gramsci refers to as the state, helps to link civil society to the current hegemonic project. Resistance, if at all present, *also* has to be organized in this civil society terrain. It is the MST leadership—what I refer to as the MST “political society”—that has the task of actively linking public schools, agrarian reform settlements, and camps to the terrain of counter-hegemony. This illustration is a more accurate depiction of the 1.5 million people living in MST settlements and camps. While the movement’s leadership hopes that this entire population is actively engaging in contentious political action and socialist forms of economic production, the majority are not linked to these counterhegemonic activities. Areas of agrarian reform, like other civil society institutions, continue to be the armor protecting the state from a frontal attack. Public schools, even if located within a MST camp or settlement, are also part of this ambiguous and ambivalent sphere. Sometimes the same public school might be simultaneously inside and outside of the terrain of counterhegemony.

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This dissertation is as an ethnography of the “MST political society,” and how activists develop relationships to the public officials, educational bureaucrats, and the communities in which public schools are embedded. I analyze activists’ attempt to construct a new socialist hegemony in the countryside, through their control of public education, which is necessarily connected to both moral leadership and the promotion of a new model of economic production. This attempt to link civil society to an alternative hegemonic project has varying levels of success at different historical moments, and in different regions of the country. The potential contribution of a Gramscian approach is to analyze reproduction and resistance as going hand-in-hand—even within a single institutional space—not as binary opposites. The Gramscian concept of hegemony replaces the trope of domination, and offers a theoretical dynamism in terms of how social relations are (re)produced. Public schools are both an important part of the state’s ideological apparatus, while also representing a civil society institution where resistance can be organized. While MST activists are attempting to transform public schools to support their struggle for rural socialism, the state is simultaneously using these same institutions to reproduce

capitalist relations of production. This Gramscian perspective helps address some of the issues I raise about the limits of the traditional political sociology approaches. Most notably, it offers a framework for understanding how synergistic state-society relations can develop, even when activists have goals that are threatening to the state's hegemonic rule.

### **Theorizing Subnational Variation**

A Gramscian perspective to state-society relations allows us to understand public institutions as terrains of dispute—both protecting the state from attack and representing the terrain on which alternative social and economic relations are organized. While in much of the social movement literature “movements” are viewed outside and in opposition to the state—and political contention versus institutionalization is always a tension—the Gramscian ambiguity of civil society allows us to overcome these dichotomies. Although the state-society literature offers a language for analyzing the blurred lines between the state and civil society, such as the notion of “coproduction,” Gramscian theories help in analyzing how this synergy and coproduction can take place when the state and civil society have opposing class interests. In other words, a Gramscian perspective allows us to theorize how a social movement can institutionalize counter-hegemonic goals within the bureaucratic state-apparatus.

This leads to a second critical question: Why, how, and under what conditions do different degrees of MST-state coproduction of public schooling occur? Or in other words, in Figure 2.4, what determines if public schools are reproducing the economic and social relations that support the hegemonic bloc, or, are linked to counterhegemonic resistance? While Gramsci offers an overall framework for analyzing these processes, his theories are less useful for understanding variation across cases—especially at the subnational level. This does not mean that Gramsci considered the state to be monolithic; to the contrary, the inspiration for many of his theories was precisely the difference between Russia and Western democracies. As he famously writes, “In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil Society and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 238). Gramsci's theory of the relationship between the state and civil society is based on these differences between nation states. However, Gramsci never discussed more specific differences concerning the nature of the bureaucratic state-apparatus.

Thus, in order to answer the question—why, how, and under what conditions do different degrees of MST-state coproduction of public schooling occur—I turn back to the literature on state-society relations and social movements, and the many concepts scholars utilize to understand variation.

#### ***Nature of the State***

There have been dozens of studies in the state-society tradition that analyze the social and institutional requisites for these types of state-society relations to develop—whether referred to as synergy, embeddedness, participatory governance, or coproduction (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2005; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Evans, 1997; Heller, 1999). There is not yet a consensus on the exact combination of factors that are needed, however, two explanations have received particular attention in the state-society literature: the varied nature of the state and the varied nature of civil society. In the state society literature, the former factor is usually discussed in terms of levels state capacity and the presence of state officials committed to a participatory project (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2005; Coelho, 2007). Although the social movement literature does not

specifically analyze state-society coproduction or synergy, they do explain the varied nature of the state, which is usually analyzed through the concept of “political opportunity structures” (McAdam, 1999; Tarrow, 1994).

### *State-Capacity*

State capacity can be broadly defined as the existence of strong state institutions, or in other words, a bureaucratic apparatus with sufficient resources, autonomy, and accumulation of expertise to implement intended policy goals (Skocpol, 1985). Tilly (2006) defines state capacity as the “degree to which governmental actions affect the distribution of populations, activities, and resources within a jurisdiction” (p. 21). To put it even more simply, state capacity is the government’s ability to do what it sets out to do. Although both Skocpol and Tilly are referring to national-level governments when discussing state capacity, the state’s ability to “affect the distribution of populations, activities, and resources within a jurisdiction” is equally relevant to subnational governments.

In the state-society literature, many scholars consider high state capacity to be a critical factor for successful participatory governance to develop. For example, Wang (1999) mentions strong states capable of avoiding special interests groups; Heller (1996, 1999) asserts that the bureaucratic-legal capacities of the state are critical for facilitating the participation of mobilized classes; while Coelho (2007) refers to a certain “know-how” necessary among officials to implement participatory projects. Other scholars have focused not only on high state capacity, but also on the role of political transparency and committed public officials in promoting participatory governance and state-society synergy (Abers, 2000; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Dagnino, 2002; Evans, 1997; Fox, 1996; Ostrom, 1996).

In contrast to these studies, there is also a group of scholars that deny that strong bureaucratic institutions are an important precondition to participatory governance. Abers and Keck (2009) argue that where governments have low levels of capacity there is potential for non-state actors to help build the state’s capacity to provide public goods. Joshi and Moore (2004) assert that it is precisely in locations where institutions are weak that participatory governance is possible, and Wolford (2010a) claims that the MST’s participatory governance is due to the weakness of the principal agrarian reform institution in Brazil. Hochstetler and Keck (2007) have also found that the successful implementation of policies in states with low capacity often requires activists to be present at all moments in the policy process.

Therefore, although levels of state capacity are clearly critical for analyzing participatory governance, there is still much debate as to whether high levels of state capacity are necessary, or if participation can develop in locations that have weak institutions. Furthermore, another potential issue with the relationship between state capacity and participatory governance is that it does not take into consideration government interests. A right-leaning government—whose officials are ideologically against state-society coproduction—may also have high levels of state capacity. This is why a second concept is necessary to analyze variation in coproduction, which I define here as the government’s orientation towards civil society.

### *Government Orientation towards Civil Society*

In this dissertation, I define “government orientation towards civil society” in this case towards the MST, as a continuum from antagonistic, tolerant, supportive, to clientelistic (non-programmatic). Antagonistic governments are defined as states that are actively attempting to prevent the participation of the MST in public institutions. Tolerant governments, on the other hand, are not directly supportive of the MST’s participation, but are also not openly antagonistic.

These are the contexts in which the role of internal reforms, state actors with the “willingness and the capacity to initiate and pursue their own interests amid contending social forces,” play a critical role (Fox, 1992, p. 16). In contrast to antagonistic and tolerant governments, supportive governments are states that openly advocate for the MST’s participation in public institutions, facilitating, when possible, the coproduction of public services within the movement.

The latter category is a clientelistic or non-programmatic government orientation. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) describe non-programmatic governments as those that stay in power based on *direct* (patron-client) exchanges with citizens, rather than *indirect* programmatic platforms. These are more commonly referred to client-patron relations. Clientelism does not refer to one-time exchanges between politicians and citizens during an election, but rather, long-term commitments of obligation and reciprocity involving face-to-face contact and inequality (Hilgers, 2012; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Roniger, 1994). Rather than simply being tolerant of the MST, a non-programmatic, clientelistic orientation towards the movement entails an entirely different set of social relations, and basis of political exchange, between the politicians and the citizens in a government jurisdiction.

For state-society scholars, what I am referring to as “government orientation” is generally understood as the presence of state officials committed to a participatory project (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2005; Coelho, 2007), or “reformists” who are tolerant of activist agendas (Borras Jr, 2001; Fox, 1992). For example, Goldfrank quotes a participatory budgeting councilor as saying: “All you need is an organized community and a politician with the will to do it. And of course money” (Goldfrank, 2011, p. 254). In other words, there does not have to be total state support for a participatory project, but certain individuals within the government who are open and willing to advocate for the proposal. However, whether or not committed officials are present within a government, and whether they actually have the power to implement participatory projects, is not explicitly theorized in this literature.

For social movement scholars, the category of “government orientation” can be more broadly understood as “political opportunity structures”—one of the most important factors for social movement emergence in the political process model. McAdam first introduced this concept in 1982, as a critique of the resource mobilization approach and the lack of analysis on political processes. He defined political opportunities as “any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured.” While long-term economic and social processes, such as industrialization, can lead to these types of political opportunities, it is how these changes lead to the transformation of the structure of political power that is the focus of his analysis (McAdam, 1999, p. 41).

The concept of political opportunity structure began to take off in the 1990s, in part because of the contributions of Tarrow, who analyzed the political roots of cycles of social protest. As Tarrow (2011) writes in his influential book, *Power in Movements*, “My strongest argument will be that it is changes in public political opportunities and constraints that create the most important incentives for triggering new phases of contention for people with collective claims” (p. 12). Tarrow further develops this concept by defining four aspects of political opportunity structures: opening of access to participation for new actors, evidence of political realignment, availability of influential allies, and emerging splits within the elite. More recently, Ondetti (2008) has attempted to apply this concept to understanding the rise and fall of cycles of protest within the MST. In drawing on Tarrow’s definition of political opportunity structures as, “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations

for success or failure” (Tarrow, 1994, p. 85), Ondetti concludes that this concept provides the most convincing explanatory framework for understanding cycles of MST mobilization.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the wide application of the concept of political opportunity over the past three decades, it has also been critiqued for (1) being too broad of a concept; (2) not taking into consideration subjective or cultural processes. Tarrow attempted to address the latter critique, by re-defining political opportunity structures as the “the [perceived] probability that social protest actions will led to success in achieving a desired outcome” (p. 160). Nonetheless, the question of how to assess where a political opportunity structure is present—perceived or otherwise—continues to plague social movement literature. This has led some of the most prominent scholars in the field to move from an analysis of macro-level structural factors, to a focus on causal mechanisms, “delimited sorts of events that change relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” (McAdam, Tilly, & Tarrow, 2001, p. 25), and processes, “frequently recurring causal chains, sequences, and combinations of mechanisms” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 27)

In analyzing the varied nature of subnational governments in Brazil, and how this affects the MST’s ability to coproduce the rural public school system, the concept of “political opportunity structure” is pertinent, but also potentially too broad of a concept. In other words, the four factors that Tarrow mentions—(1) access to participation for new actors; (2) evidence of political realignment; (2) availability of influential allies, and, (4) emerging splits within the elite—are *also* relevant processes at the subnational level. However, comparing these across two federal agencies, three state governments, and two municipalities in an overwhelming task. Furthermore, unlike Tarrow, I am not analyzing social movement emergence, but rather, the ability of a social movement that is already well known among the Brazilian polity to participate in the provision of public goods. Therefore, while the concept of political opportunity structures is a useful theoretical backdrop, I have defined the varied nature of the state much more narrowly, as a continuum of government orientations towards the MST. Figure 2.5 illustrates the spectrum of government orientations towards the MST in the cases explored in this dissertation.

*Figure 2.5: Continuum of Government Orientations towards the MST*

Antagonistic → Tolerant → Supportive → Clientelistic

### ***Nature of Civil Society***

A second set of explanations in the state-society literature about what leads to participatory governance and coproduction concerns the nature civil society. Many scholars argue that a self-organized and mobilized civil society is necessary for coproduction to develop (Baiocchi et al., 2008; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Evans, 1997; Heller, 1999; Keck, 1992). Some scholars refer to this mobilization as “well-coordinated social actors” (Cornwall & Coelho,

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<sup>36</sup> Specifically, he explains why the MST went through a period of mass mobilization in the mid-1990s, a decline at the turn of the century, and a resurgence following the election of the Workers Party in 2002. He argues that while grievances, indigenous resources, and activists’ strategies are all important components of the MST’s ability to stay mobilized, it is only “political opportunity structure”—purposely applied narrowly—that helps to predict levels of MST mobilization. Ondetti also includes subjective factors in this analysis of political opportunities, such as the ways that events change public perceptions that affect opportunities for mobilization.

2007), while others refer to a “robust sphere of civil associational life” (Wang, 1999), or “stocks of social capital in society” (Evans, 1997). Wampler and Avritzer (2004) argue that the development of “participatory publics” among organized civil society groups in Brazil after the transition to democracy drove the processes of state-society participation, as these groups voted for reformist political coalitions that would implement participatory institutions.

However, in contrast to the social movement literature, these studies do not focus on how social movements emerge, but rather, how *the state* can mobilize the participation of civil society.<sup>37</sup> While these explanations are helpful, in the cases I analyze in this dissertation, it is the *MST activists* that are attempting to force the state to allow civil society to participate in public schools. Thus, in analyzing the MST’s ability to mobilize externally (show its force), I turn to the political process approach to social movement theory. In addition, there is a second type of mobilization that is critical for understanding variation in the implementation of social movement goals in the bureaucratic state apparatus: the internal mobilization of civil society (leadership-base relations). For analyzing this latter factor, I turn to Gramsci and Wolford (2010b).

### *External Levels of Mobilization*

In analyzing external levels of mobilization, or in other words, the MST’s ability to organize contentious protests, mobilizations, and build alliances with other groups in civil society, the political process approach to social movement research is extremely useful. In this approach, there are four factors that are central to social movement emergence: (1) political opportunities (McAdam, 1999; Tarrow, 2011); (2) indigenous and elite resources that activists can draw on (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; Lind & Stepan-Norris, 2011; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Morris, 1984); (3) effective frames that resonate with a significant number of people (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988); and finally, (4) repertoires of contention (Tilly, 2008). Since I already elaborated on political opportunity structures, I concentrate here on explaining how resources, framing, and repertoires can help us understand external mobilization.

The role of indigenous and elite resources was first discussed in the early 1970s, and was a direct response to scholars in the “collective behavior school,” who analyzed collective action as resulting from grievances. Instead, the resource mobilization scholars maintained that preexisting organizational networks were critical to movement emergence (Morris, 1984; Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978), regardless of the amount of grievance and suffering in a community. In some versions of this thesis, resources coming from external actors are equally critical in explaining social movement mobilization (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977). In his 1982 presentation of the political process model, McAdam claims that theories of resource mobilization are not adequate in explaining the emergence of social movements, due to the focus on elite institutions that supposedly *give* movements the opportunity to mobilize.<sup>38</sup> Instead, he

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<sup>37</sup> For example, in several studies civil society becomes organized and ready to participate through the “scaling up of networks” (Wampler & Avritzer, 2004), state-led “pedagogical campaigns and participatory forums” (Abers, 2000; Houtzager, 1998), or a concerted attempt to transform worldviews or engage in identity formation (Evans, 1997; Goldfrank, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Morris and McAdam were doing the research for these books at the same time, and cite each other’s dissertations in their bibliographies. However, the connection between the different theories these two authors develop is unclear in their writing. McAdam cites Morris twice, along with several other authors in a general statement about the existence of indigenous organizations in the South. Morris, however, is never cited for helping to develop an approach that looks at “indigenous organizations,” nor does Morris cite McAdam.

proposes the study of indigenous networks, as one factor leading to social movement emergence. Two years later, Morris (1984) published a book on the civil rights movement that also critiques the prior focus on elite institutions. Morris proposed an “indigenous approach” to studying social movements, which focuses on the internal resources already available in a community. The publication of these two books represents a clear shift in the literature towards analyzing resources *within* poor communities fighting for social change.

The notion of framing grew out of the field of social psychology and was first applied to social movements in the mid-1980s (Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow et al., 1986). As Robert Benford writes in 2014, “we strategically framed the original 1986 article so it aligned with the resource mobilization and structuralist perspectives that dominated the field throughout the 1970s and 1980s” (Snow, Benford, McCammon, Hewitt, & Fitzgald, 2014, p. 29). These “collective action frames” are defined as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meaning that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). “Frame alignment” is the process whereby actors consciously create these forms of collective interpretation—the frame—in order to align with the interests, values, goals and beliefs of other individuals and groups (Snow et al., 1986). The capacity for these collective interpretations to align with the values and beliefs of other individuals is called “resonance.” The amount of resonance a frame has is the frame’s ability to “make sense,” connect with, or be accepted by another individual. Frames become devices to construct social meanings that resonate with particular actors, or to contest particular logics (Snow et al., 1986). In other words, frames are the ways that movement leaders give meaning to their struggle to resonate with a broad range of individuals and groups (see Chapter 4 for more discussion and critique).

Finally, Tilly (2008, pp. 4–5) defines “repertoires of contention” as the range of claim-making performances available at a given time. Repertoires of contentious performances change incrementally, and therefore, people are limited in their choices for public demand-making. In addition, repertoires of contention vary drastically across the world. Tilly argues that political regimes shape collective demand-making, and that particular repertoires are more likely to occur under certain regimes. He defines “political regime” as “repeated, strong interactions among major political actors,” or, the “prevailing relations among political actors, including the government” (Tilly, 2006, p. 19). The concept of repertoires of contention is useful in analyzing the limited political performances open to social movement leaders.

The concepts of indigenous and elite resources, framing and other cognitive processes, and repertoires of contention are useful tools in analyzing levels of MST mobilization—or the capacity the movement has to show its force through massive protests, mobilizations, and other contentions actions. However, in analyzing the MST’s participation in the public educational sphere, the primary issue at stake is not how the MST becomes more mobilized at certain moments than others—which is the central focus of Ondetti’s (2008) and many other social movement studies<sup>39</sup>—but rather, what are the conditions that allow activists to engage in the provision of rural public education? And why do government actors work with MST activists to help implement educational practices in public schools that support the movement’s larger political struggle in the countryside? Levels of MST mobilization are undoubtedly an important *component* in analyzing why activists have become responsible for the provision of public education in certain social contexts—as the opening vignette illuminates. However, a major

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<sup>39</sup> For example, see: (Kim & Bearman, 1997; McAdam, Tilly, & Tarrow, 2001; McAdam, 1999; Roscigno & Hodson, 2004; Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, & Weffer-Elizondo, 2005; Sherman, 2011; Taylor, 2011; R. Wright & Boudet, 2012).

claim of this dissertation is that mobilization is only one aspect of understanding a social movement's ability to engage the state in the provision of public goods.

*Internal Dynamics: Maintaining Moral and Intellectual Leadership*

Finally, a big limitation in both the political process model and the state-society literature is a lack of language for discussing variation within social movements, or in other words, why the same movement can look very different in diverse regional contexts. Again, for most scholars in the political process/resource mobilization tradition defining the boundaries of a movement is a fairly straightforward task. As already mentioned above, Tilly argues that only certain forms of collective behavior should be considered a "social movement," which he defines as a "sustained interaction in which mobilized people, acting in the name of a defined interest, make repeated demands on powerful others via means which go beyond the current prescriptions of the authorities" (1984, p. 313). Here, the emphasis is on *sustained* forms of contestation, which represent a united commitment to change and some minimal organizational structure. Other scholars emphasize the latter part of this definition—the non-institutional tactics—that makes social movements distinct from lobby groups (McAdam, 1999). Either way, there is always a clear line that can be drawn around a group of people that form a collective social movement.

In contrast to these scholars, Wolford (2010b) has suggested that it is problematic to think of social movements as a single, united, and cohesive movement. As previously noted, she writes that social movements "should not be seen as coherent, relatively unified subaltern actors, but as sets of competing discourses negotiating for the rights and ability to define who will represent the poor and how" (Wolford, 2010b, p. 10).<sup>40</sup> Drawing on subaltern studies,<sup>41</sup> Wolford argues that the "thick lines" between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the MST are only drawn for strategic reasons. These lines are much more fluid on the ground. In referring to this "thick line" she is evoking the commonly held notion that there are 350,000 families in the MST today (MST, 2013; A. Wright & Wolford, 2003, p. xiii)—approximately 1.5 million people—which includes all women, men, and children currently living on camps or settlements established through MST land occupations.

Wolford argues that people move in and out of the MST, that identification with the movement is fluid, and that participation has to be understood in terms of the different moral economies that develop out of distinct agrarian histories. Again, my own fieldwork corroborates Wolford's argument that the one million people living on agrarian reform settlements and camps are far from a coherent, cohesive, and united social movement. In fact, if there appears to be any unity at all at the national level, it is due to what Wolford (2010b)—drawing on Gayatri Spivak—refers to as "strategic essentialism": "intentional simplifications of an otherwise complex subject for the purposes of democratic engagement" (p. 8). While the MST national leadership tends to present the movement as a massive and united group of rural peasants struggling for similar outcomes, the diverse populations currently living in settlements and

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<sup>40</sup> Similar interventions have been made in the new social movement literature, by scholars who also argue that movements are plural, ambivalent, and often contradictory actors (Melucci, 1996, p. 78).

<sup>41</sup> Subaltern studies originally referred to a group of scholars of South Asian interested in studying postcolonial societies from the perspective of populations oppressed by race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. The term has expanded to include other scholars sharing a similar viewpoint. Scholars such as Eric Stokes, David Arnold, Partha Catterjee, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak are scholars originally associated with this tradition.



camps have complex, conflictive and often shifting relationships to the movement. This variation is critical in analyzing the MST leadership’s ability to collaborate with the state.

The following table illustrates these four different concepts that I utilize in analyzing variation in the implementation of social movement goals, and the bodies of literatures on which these concepts draw.

*Table 2.1: Conceptual Toolkit for Theorizing Variation in the Institutionalization of Social Movement Goals*

|                                |  | <b>Social Movement Literature</b>   | <b>State-Society Relations</b>  | <b>Gramsci</b>   |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Nature of the State</b>     | <b>State Capacity</b>                                    | <i>No explicit theory of state capacity.</i>  | Extensive theory of how state capacity develops; (debate between relative benefits of high versus low state capacity in participatory governance) | The state’s ability to survive a frontal attack differs based on the strength and development of civil society.  |
|                                | <b>Government Orientation</b>                            | Political Opportunity Structures (broad concept concerning political shifts, elite divisions, new allies).                | Importance of “committed state officials.”  | Theory of competing class interests within a single hegemonic bloc; <i>no explicit theory of variation in government orientation.</i>  |
| <b>Nature of Civil Society</b> | <b>External Mobilization (showing force)</b>             | Repertoires of contention, framing, elite and indigenous resources.   | State-centered theories of how <i>states</i> mobilize civil society participation.  | War of movement.   |
|                                | <b>Internal Mobilization (leadership-base relations)</b> | Theories of different organizational models; <i>no explicit theory of internal dynamics or leadership-base relations.</i> | <i>No explicit theory of internal movement dynamics or leadership-base relations.</i>   | War of position; distinction between <i>political society</i> (social movement leadership) and <i>civil society</i> (people participating in movement at different moments). |

### **Implications for Participatory Governance and “Real Utopias”**

The question of how to encourage civil society participation and participatory governance is currently a concern for policy makers and international organizations around the world. The World Bank Institute (WBI) has an entire program on “collaborative governance,” which states that the WBI “believes that supporting open and collaborative governance will enable local change agents to achieve development results in their own contexts. Guided by this vision, WBI seeks to strengthen the capacity of citizens to use innovative tools and practical approaches toward engendering participatory and sustainable change.”<sup>42</sup> World bank consultants, NGOs, government officials, academics, and other actors are dedicated to finding the right combination of incentives, programs, and other tools to garner participatory governance—as a more effective

<sup>42</sup> World Bank Institute website, <<http://wbi.worldbank.org/wbi/about/topics/governance>> (accessed May 12, 2014).

way of delivering public goods and fostering social change. Public schools, as institutions already embedded within particular communities, are key locations to explore these participatory processes.

Nevertheless, a common assumption among the diverse organizations and groups promoting participatory governance is that civil society does not automatically participate in governance; rather, state officials and development actors must find ways of “engendering participatory and sustainable change.” This assumption ignores the fact that dozens of social movements around the world are currently demanding the right to participate in the everyday decision-making processes that affect their lives. Furthermore, many of these social movements, whether struggling for women’s rights or against racism, have incorporated direct participatory democracy as one of the primary demands of their struggles. These activists have already refined the practice of participatory governance within their own movements, and are ready to apply these processes to public institutions. How does our analysis of participatory governance change, when we begin to analyze participation as a bottom-up initiative promoted by particular social movements that often have contentious relationships to the state?

In examining the MST’s attempt to participate in the public school system, I expand on studies within state-society literature that focus on “progressive experiments” in the global south (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2005; Evans, 2008; Sandbrook, Edelman, Heller, & Teichman, 2007). Such studies investigate how the “process of negotiation and forging compromises” (Heller, 1999, p. 21) between mobilized classes and the state redefines state institutions and creates institutional channels for participation that, “constrain and enable both the state and civil society” (Baiocchi, 2005, p. 152). These studies focus on what Williams (2008) calls counter-hegemonic generative politics: “the dominance of civil society over the institutions of the state and economy through radically democratic politics” (p. 19). Wright (2013) also refers to these experiments as real utopias: “Institutions that in one way or another prefigure more radical emancipatory alternatives” (p. 9).

The concept of “real utopias” is useful in analyzing the MST’s educational initiatives, because the movement is actively involved in both “envision[ing] the counters of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals,” and “look[ing] for social innovations we can create in the world as it is that move us towards that destination” (E. O. Wright, 2013, p. 9). In other words, the MST has developed an entire proposal for a alternative social world it wants to create. These proposals include the democratization of land ownership, the reorganization of production, cooperative agricultural production, the collective use of technology, food sovereignty, the distribution of income and agricultural development, rural development, and popular democracy (Robles, 2001). However, as opposed to waiting until taking state power to create this alternative world, the MST finds innovative ways to implement these goals in contemporary public institutions, the “world as it is.”

Wright refers to the development of real utopias as a two-step strategy; first activists must build real utopian institutions that embody democratic egalitarian processes through “interstitial transformation,” or in other words, in capitalist society’s “niches and margins.” Then, through symbiotic transformation that involves working with the state, activists can expand and build on these interstitial innovations. Wright argues that, “The interplay between interstitial and symbiotic strategies could then create a trajectory of deepening socialist elements within the hybrid capitalist system” (E. O. Wright, 2013, p. 21). The MST’s educational initiatives correspond to this two-part process, both involving the development of radical educational alternatives in institutions that exist in the “margins” and “niches” of Brazilian society; and through the

implementation of these educational practices in the public school system. The interaction between these two strategies—interstitial and symbiotic—are a theme throughout the cases explored in this dissertation. The real educational utopias that the MST develops outside of the public educational sphere, in the “margins” of society, play a critical role in activists’ ability to negotiate and implement their educational proposal in the public sphere.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize, once again, that while the MST’s effort to implement alternative educational proposals in public schools represents a unique example of participatory governance, the MST’s educational initiatives have a dual purpose. On the one hand, MST activists work with public officials to improve the quality of rural public education and encourage youth to stay in the countryside. On the other hand, these educational initiatives are a direct attempt to support socialist forms of economic agricultural production. This dual function of the MST’s participation in the public educational sphere makes the case of the MST different than the majority of the literature on participatory governance, which examines pluralistic and individualistic forms of participation. Although the MST encourages all community members to participate in defining educational goals, activists have specific proposals for public schools that they attempt to promote through this participatory process.

This dissertation moves away from examining universal forms of participatory governance, to asking: how do social movements succeed in implementing their goals within the state? In other words, how do civil society groups who already have well-developed proposal for transforming the public sphere succeed in participating and implementing these proposals? I attempt to answer this question by examining the different institutional trajectories that the MST’s educational initiatives have taken at the federal, state, and municipal levels. In some of these locations the educational discussions, teacher trainings, and writing of new curriculum have moved in directions that are not only disconnected from their anti-capitalist origins, but have incorporated new aspects of the neoliberal hegemonic order—such as an emphasis on large agribusinesses in the countryside. However, in other contexts students are continuing to sing the “MST national anthem” every morning in school, practice collective-oriented pedagogies, participate in manual as well as intellectual labor, and learn to internalize the struggle for socialism in the countryside. While in some hierarchical institutions there has been a significant degree of de-radicalization of the MST’s educational ideas, in other institutional contexts the MST continues to directly participate in these educational programs and ensure that they adhere to their radical roots.

Drawing on a Gramscian perspective on states, social movements, and public education, the overall argument in this dissertation is the following: social movements engaging in the state realm will have distinct institutional trajectories; the state is not a totalizing institution; and there are many ways activists can have agency by working with, in and through the state apparatus. Although this agency often leads to new class alliances that ultimately reinforce the same dominant modes of production, this is not the same process as co-optation or incorporation. Rather, social movements—through their activism within and outside of the state—have the potential to transform public institutions in ways that directly impact people’s lives. The key empirical question in this dissertation is why this process varies across the country.

## PART II: TRANSFORMING THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

*“How do we maintain this movement? Negotiating with the state without being absorbed.”*  
–Professor Antonio Munarim, member of the National Forum for *Educação do Campo*<sup>43</sup>

*“I would not call it co-optation but rather a type of institutionalization, if you are there in the school but you are also in the struggle and connected to the larger debates than this is good. It is only cooptation if you stop articulating with the movement.”*  
–Erivan Hilário, MST Activist<sup>44</sup>

In Part II of this dissertation I hope to shed new light on an old question: What happens when social movements succeed in pressuring governments to institutionalize their goals? And, how do states, social movements, and the goals themselves transform through this process of institutionalization? By institutionalization, I refer to the incorporation of activists’ demands into the bureaucratic state apparatus, either through new public policies, bureaucratic offices, ad hoc programs, the hiring of movement activists for new government positions, or the incorporation of activist voices into state decision-making structures through permanent advisory boards. Over the past two decades MST activists—and the multifaceted educational alliances they have formed—transformed the institutional landscape concerning rural education in Brazil. The following three chapters analyze how the MST first developed this educational approach, the circumstances and strategies that allowed activists to push this alternative proposal into the national educational debate, and how the movement’s educational goals became institutionalized within two different federal ministries. The take-home point is that the incorporation of social movement goals into the bureaucratic state apparatus does not always result in movement demobilization and decline; rather, social movements have ample space to transform the state, and the institutionalization of goals can take many forms with distinct outcomes.

### Clarifying the Piven and Cloward-Michels Debate

More than three decades ago, Piven and Cloward (1977) drew on Michel’s (1915) notion of the iron rule of oligarchy to intervene in the social movement literature and argue that disruptive protest is much more effective in achieving movement goals than organization and cooperation. The Piven and Cloward–Michels thesis has had a lasting effect on social movement research. Those who interrogate this argument have often done so without a theoretically clear distinction between the three different processes at the heart of this thesis: (1) the effects of oligarchization, (2) the de-radicalization of social movement goals, and, (3) the incorporation of activists’ goals into state institutions. Leach’s (2005) article, “The Iron Rule of What Again?” makes an analytical distinction between the first of these two processes, to which she refers to as the development of oligarchy versus goal displacement/bureaucratic conservatism. Leach (2005) argues that a common approach to the study of oligarchy is, “to focus on Michel’s supposed claims that organizations also inevitably lead to conservatism through the process of goal displacement” (p. 318). However, Leach continues, asking why an organization adopts less radical goals is not the same as asking how many people are ruling the organization. In fact, she

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Antonio Munarim, November 28, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Erivan Hilário, October 25, 2011.

argues, radical goals are often maintained even as organizations become more oligarchical. Leach (2005) focuses her analysis on conditions that facilitate the development of oligarchy, which she defines as a particular distribution of illegitimate power that has become entrenched over time (p. 316). Her main contribution is that oligarchy can develop outside of organizational structures, and therefore, oligarchy is not necessarily a product of more formal organization.

The second component of the Piven and Cloward–Michels thesis is the study of conservatism, or goal displacement, whereby formal bureaucratic organization is seen as antithetical to the use of social confrontation and radical goals. Voss and Sherman’s (2000) article, “Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy,” contradicts this thesis, illustrating that movements—in their case union locals—may become radicalized after decades of bureaucratic conservatism. Therefore, we cannot assume that because movements follow the iron rule of oligarchy at one point in history activists cannot break this iron law at another moment. This intervention contests the idea that activists who use less confrontational tactics to achieve their movement’s goals are destined to follow this mode forever. Rather, social movements have different trajectories over time, which affects the intensity of the goals they choose to pursue. This process is often independent of degrees of organization, levels of oligarchy, and top-down decision-making structures.

Finally, the third strain of the Piven and Cloward–Michels thesis—which is the central focus of Chapters 4 and 5—concerns the trajectories of social movements that engage in the institutional sphere. Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that the tendency to channel contention through institutions has a devastating effect on leaders’ ability to organize future protests. For example, in discussing the civil rights movement the authors describe how the government integrated the leadership of the black movement, and refocused leaders’ energy on intra-institutional politics, not grassroots mobilization (p. 255). Similarly, in the case of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), the authors argue that, “NWRO gradually became enmeshed in a web of relationships with government officials and private groups, it was transformed from a protest organization to a negotiating and lobbying organization . . . on behalf of a constituency that was organized in name only” (p. 317). In both cases, leaders of social movements become involved in institutional relationships that preoccupy their time, their energy, and their ability to mobilize at the grassroots level. Although Piven and Cloward (1977) later argue that parties can be reformed to incorporate the agendas of popular movements (pp. 271–272), the overall message in their work is still to view institutionalization as a negative process.

In recent literature on the Latin American feminist movement, the issue of institutionalization has been a central topic of debate (Alvarez, 1990, 1999, 2009; Lebon, 1996; Santos, 2010). Alvarez (1990) takes a more nuanced position than Piven and Cloward on this question, arguing that while the process of “taking feminism into the state” often results in the co-optation of progressive gender ideologies by dominant political and economic interests, this strategy can also produce concrete improvements in the conditions of women’s lives (p. 21). Alvarez promotes a “dual strategy,” whereby activists continue to engage in grassroots contentious politics while also directly working with policy makers and politicians. In Brazil, this “dual strategy” allowed feminists to make important inroads within the state. However, she warns, “those inroads will not necessarily be transformed into permanent paths to effective power and political influence” (Alvarez, 1990). In later writings, Alvarez (1999, 2009) focuses on how the increase in feminist NGOs has affected this dual strategy. She vacillates on the issue, arguing that in the late 1990s, overall, the rise in NGOs has inhibited this dual strategy as NGOs now primarily function as the administrators of state programs (Alvarez, 1999). A decade later,

she shifts to defending NGOs as critical to sustaining the feminist field through their constant engagement with “movement work” (Alvarez, 2009). In this later article Alvarez (2009) concludes that, “There is, in short, no 21<sup>st</sup> century Iron Law of NGO-ization” (p. 182).

Another recent analysis of the institutionalization of social movement goals is Rojas’s (2007) study of the rise of Black Studies departments in U.S. universities. Rojas (2007) critiques the weighty focus in social movement literature on how movements sustain themselves overtime, and instead emphasizes “how organizations targeted by the movements support the movement’s achievements” (p. 8). Rojas argues that the long-term success of the movement for black studies depended as much on college administrators as on the students and activists themselves (p. 8). This affirms the importance of analyzing the state-society relations that develop as social movements engage in the institutional realm. Rojas argues that social movements change bureaucracies through two stages: the first involves mobilization and direct action, and the second, a search for legitimacy.<sup>45</sup> While I also focus on how social movements engage with state institutions, my empirical findings follow more along the lines of Alvarez’s “dual strategy,” whereby contestation and bureaucratization occur in parallel. However, my findings corroborate Rojas’ (2007) argument that once movement goals are institutionalized outcomes can become examples of a counter-center: “a formalized space for oppositional consciousness in a mainstream institution” (p. 21). In the following three chapters I interrogate the third strain of the Piven and Cloward–Michels thesis: the consequences for social movements that successfully institutionalize their goals within the state.

## **Brazil’s Institutional Landscape**

In the capital city of Brasília, twenty-four Brazilian ministries line the left and right side of the main road leading up to the Plaza of Three Powers, where the Presidential Palace, the Supreme Court, and Congress are located. Designed to resemble a plane, the three executive powers are in the “cockpit,” symbolically driving the country. The ministries that line the road leading up to the Plaza form the body of the plane; symbolically holding the citizens of Brazil safely within it. This analogy is appropriate, given the daily influence these ministries have on the lives of the Brazilian population. From the Ministries of Sports and Culture to the Ministry of Labor Employment, the programs these agencies implement directly affect everyday life in Brazil. Despite the standardized physical appearance of these ministries in Brasília—with their equal heights and the windows tinted green—each of these twenty-four agencies has a distinct history and culture. In order to understand contemporary state-society relations in Brazil, these histories and institutional cultures must be taken into consideration.

The Ministry of Education (MEC) is a large, hierarchical and highly bureaucratic state institution, charged with modernizing the country’s public education system. The Ministry was founded in 1930, when universal education first became a national goal. For thirty years the provision of public education was centralized in this ministry, until the first Law of Basic Educational Guidelines (LDB) was passed in 1961. This law decentralized much authority over the provision of public education to municipal and state governments. Although there was a partial recentralization of educational administration during the two decades of military dictatorship, the new constitution in 1988 devolved complete authority over schooling, once

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<sup>45</sup> At another point he becomes more specific, dividing the process in six stages: stage: identifying a problem, mobilizing for a cause, causing conflict, generating alternatives, establishing new institutions, and accommodation (Rojas, 2007, p. 16).

again, to states and municipalities. The role of the federal government was thus reduced to the provision of tertiary education, and providing technical and financial support to states and municipalities through an ambiguously defined “regime of collaboration.” When the Workers Party (PT) took power in 2003, the government set a new series of priorities for education, including support for diversity within schools and the inclusion of civil society in the provision of public education. These priorities contradicted the MEC’s historical monopoly on educational expertise and the agency’s traditional goal of providing a single, universal education for citizens.

Despite the complete decentralization of public education in Brazil, the MEC still remains one of the most important educational authorities in the country. First of all, the MEC is charged with developing general policies and laws for education, which municipal and state governments are legally obligated to follow. Although the implementation of these policies does not always occur in practice, these laws can become important tools for local social actors attempting to implement reforms at the municipal and state level. Secondly, the MEC can influence municipal and state governments through conditional funding and federal-state/municipal partnerships around specific programs. Finally, the MEC also has shared authority over the provision of higher education. These three methods of influence—federal laws and policies; conditional funding and partnerships with municipal and state governments; and higher education provision—in addition to MEC’s large budget, make it a powerful agency in the educational landscape in Brazil. Therefore, the MST’s national campaign to implement *Educação do Campo* within the Ministry of Education merits particular attention.

The other agency that is the focus of Part II of this dissertation is the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), located in the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA). The very existence of the MDA is a testament to the contrary models of development being promoted in Brazil. On the one hand, the Ministry of Agriculture invests in large-scale agribusiness and supports a primary export model. On the other hand, the Ministry of Agrarian Development, which only became its own agency in 1999, promotes small-scale farming in the countryside. Needless to say, the Ministry of Agriculture is much better financed than the Ministry of Agrarian Development. The agency INCRA—in charge of administering all agrarian reform initiatives—is even more underfunded.

Wolford (2010a, 2014) has written extensively about the history of INCRA within Brazil’s institutional landscape. The agency was created on July 9, 1970, during the period of military dictatorship, in order to oversee the colonization of the northwestern Amazonian region of Brazil. The goals of these re-colonization programs were to quell rural unrest in the northeast and southern states and to “civilize” a part of the country over which the military government had little control. As Wolford writes, “INCRA employees were responsible for creating ‘cities out of nothing’” (Wolford, 2014, p. 8). In the early 1980s, the government set up a number of new special agencies to speed up colonization in the Amazon, and INCRA became subordinated to these new agencies. In 1982, the military government created the Extraordinary Ministry for Land Affairs (MAEFF), in order to nationalize these policies. However, this largely failed and colonization activities were still concentrated in the Amazon during the early-1980s (Ondetti, 2008, p. 87).

In 1985, in the face of increasing land conflicts, the Ministry of Reform and Agrarian Development was created, but its existence was short-lived as it was terminated in 1989. Meanwhile, by the mid-1980s this process of colonization in the Amazon was slowly coming to an end, due to both project failure and dwindling resources. In 1987, the Brazilian Congress terminated INCRA, and the agency’s functions were distributed to other ministries. However,

INCRA's demise only lasted for two years, due to the massive protests that erupted following its closure. In 1989 the agency re-opened, but with a very different mission than the previous period: Instead of colonization, "The agency's main focus would now be on settlement and instead of working on the frontier where public land seemed to be freely available; they would now be expected to expropriate land from large landowners in the heart of settled areas within each state" (Wolford, 2014, p. 19). From 1990 to 1995, INCRA was incorporated into the Ministry of Agriculture, known during that period as the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (1990-1992) and then the Minister of Agriculture, Supply and Agrarian Reform (1993-1995). Finally, after the 1996 *Eldorado dos Carajás* massacre, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso created a new Ministry separate from the Ministry of Agriculture. This ministry was known as the Extraordinary Ministry of Agrarian Reform, until 1999, when the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MDA) was established.

Currently, INCRA is located in the MDA and oversees all of the judicial, technical, and administrative aspects of agrarian reform. As Wolford argues, "Its employees are the state's conduit to the landless rural poor, the most impoverished, most marginalize population in Brazil" (p. 96). The agency itself is physically decentralized, with federal offices in every state of Brazil. Nonetheless, due to this rocky history of continual shifts in INCRA's institutional form, mission, and governmental support, the agency emerged in the twenty-first century as arguably the least well-funded and most under-staffed institution in the Brazilian government (Wolford, 2010a). This "institutional weakness" is in distinct contrast to the Ministry of Education, which has been a staple of Brazilian bureaucracy since 1930.

## Roadmap for Chapters 3 to 5

In Part II of this dissertation I explore how MST activists went from promoting isolated educational practices in areas of agrarian reform, to engaging in a national campaign that transformed the federal government's "official" approach to rural schooling. In Chapter 3, I analyze why activists first decided to engage in the public educational sphere. I argue that although the MST's incorporation of informal educational practices within their movement was typical of Latin American social movements during this time period, as a *socio-territorial* movement MST activists began to realize that public schools were threatening the reproduction of alternative social relations in their territories. I explore the theories that the MST used to develop their educational proposal, and the critical role of "educational utopias"—educational institutions outside of the traditional public school sphere—in helping activists across the country understand what the MST's educational proposal looks like in practice.

Chapter 4 and 5 tell stories that are unfolding in parallel, with overlapping actors but distinct institutional trajectories of educational reform. In Chapter 4, I analyze the twenty-year struggle that transformed the MST's isolated educational experiences in the early 1990s, into the Ministry of Education's official approach to rural public schooling in the twenty-first century—*Educação do Campo*. On its face, this is a fairly traditional story of activists entering the state sphere and succeeding in institutionalizing their goals, with several concrete gains, but also a series of bureaucratic barriers they must face that minimize the radical aspects of activists' original goals. At a deeper level, however, this is also a story of social movements crossing the public-private divide, transforming state institutions in concrete ways, and also transforming themselves in the process (Borras Jr, 2001; Fox, 1992). I explore the strategies that MST activists utilized to advocate for these educational reforms, which included developing a network of powerful allies, taking advantage of political opportunities created by previous social



mobilizations, strategically framing their struggle to build a broad coalition, and developing alliances across the state-society divide. I analyze the tensions inherent in this process of national coalition building, and how social movements transform each other through united struggle. Then, I outline the administrative and bureaucratic barriers activists face implementing social reforms in practice, within the context of a changing political economy. Finally, I reflect on the dangers of ‘elite capture,’ or in other words, why *Educação do Campo* is now supported by a diverse class alliance that serves to reinforce the dominant mode of production.

In Chapter 5 I analyze a different educational program, the National Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA), which was incorporated into the agency INCRA, in Ministry of Agricultural Development. In this chapter I argue that a *single* social movement attempting to incorporate *similar* educational goals in *different* state institutions can produce distinct outcomes—for the radicalness of the institutionalized goals and for the movement’s own levels of mobilization. These differences in outcomes depend on the nature of the state agencies. This focus on the diversity of institutions into which social movement goals become incorporated, assimilated, or co-opted has not been a central concern for most social movement scholars. Unlike *Educação do Campo* in the Ministry of Education, PRONERA has been able to retain many of the radical components of the MST’s pedagogical proposal. I analyze how the movement used PRONERA to “occupy the universities” and offer alternative bachelor degree programs to MST activists. However, given the counter-hegemonic status of PRONERA within the Brazilian institutional landscape, high levels of MST mobilization are necessary to keep this program functioning. Together, Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate that the incorporation of social movement goals into the bureaucratic state apparatus can result in very different institutional trajectories.

## Chapter 3: Pedagogical Innovations and Educational Utopias: Defining the MST's Educational Approach

*In the MST, your life, your family, depends on the movement. The force the MST has in our life is much more than other movements. This is the Pedagogy of the Movement.*

-Rosali Caldart, September 2011<sup>46</sup>

This chapter analyzes how the MST developed its pedagogical approach to rural schooling. As a movement struggling for socialism in the countryside, it was never inevitable that MST activists concern themselves with public schools—perceived by many activists as an arm of the oppressive capitalist state. In fact, MST activists *did not* initially participate in the public schools, but rather, sought to bypass them through educational activities that were organized by the community outside of the public school sphere. It was the Catholic Church, liberation theology, and Paulo Freire that inspired these types of non-formal educational initiatives, that were commonly known as popular<sup>47</sup> education. Similarly to other social movements in Latin America, popular education became and remained a core component of the MST's political struggle.

However, in contrast to other movements such as the labor movement, the MST's leadership was not only making demands on the state but also trying to exert moral and intellectual leadership over entire territories in the countryside—to promote an alternative hegemonic project. These were territories where families were both working and engaging in all other aspects of social life, such as playing soccer, organizing birthday parties, and, attending public schools. The traditional approach to education in the public schools on MST settlements began to threaten the movement's ability to maintain their leadership in their communities. In this context, the MST searched out other experiences, theories, and pedagogical practices that could help activists “occupy” not only the land, but also “occupy” the public school system.

The following chapter analyzes this transition within the MST—from a movement of popular educators to a movement of public school teachers—exploring how the Pedagogy of the MST was constructed through an interaction between theory and practice. The first part of the chapter explores how the movement transitioned from promoting internal popular educational practices to participating in the public schools. To begin this section, I review the history of popular education in Latin America and contextualize MST activists' initial interest in education. I then analyze how activists began to realize the critical role of public schools within the movement's larger political struggle, and the reasons for this strategic shift. The second part of the chapter examines the development of the MST's pedagogical approach to rural schooling, and the diverse theoretical traditions on which activists draw. The third and final part discusses how the Pedagogy of the MST evolved through concrete practices, and the role that “utopian” educational experiences play in the MST's struggle to transform the entire rural public school system in Brazil.

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<sup>46</sup> Speaking to students in a course on the “Pedagogy of the MST.” (Field notes, September 2011).

<sup>47</sup> In Portuguese and Spanish, the word “popular” has a different connotation than in English. Rather than referring to well liked or in fashion, the word “popular” refers to something that is common and wide-spread, or in other words, that belongs to the “popular” masses (Kane, 2001).

## **Putting the MST in Context: Popular Education in Latin America**

### ***Catholic Church and Liberation Theology***

The decade of the 1950s and early 1960s was a moment of intense political organizing in Brazil. The union movement was gaining strength in urban areas, and rural organizing was at a peak. Communist party members were helping to form peasant leagues, and radicalized peasants were demanding agrarian reform across the country. In 1961 President Jânio Quadros resigned, which brought the left-leaning vice president João Goulart to power. Goulart began to push for many of the reforms social movements had been demanding, such as education, tax, and electoral reforms, the nationalization of oil refineries, and most significantly, an extensive agrarian reform proposal. In this Cold War context, the combination of bottom-up and top-down social reform was extremely threatening to the economic and military elite, and a military coup took place on March 31, 1964, which overthrew Goulart and put Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco into power. Although the military dictatorship was initially tolerant of some political organizing, military hard-liner General Artur da Costa e Silva came to power 1967. A year later he passed the Institutional Act 5, which declared all crimes against “national security” as subject to military justice (Skidmore, 2010). This was a period of utmost political repression in Brazil, when all political organizing had to go underground.

During the mid- to late-1970s the political context in Brazil began to shift, as people took to the streets, calling for a return to democracy. These new mobilizations were not entirely comprised of the traditional left, which included the labor movement and communist-led party organizations; rather, these mobilizations were also emerging from churches and women’s groups in the periphery of urban centers. These sectors of Brazilian society were considered less threatening to the military state, and therefore, had more freedom to contest an authoritarian regime. The church played a particularly critical role in these mobilizations, offering both organizational and ideological support to other local groups. Organizational support was offered through the physical use of church space and material resources like money and food, while ideological support occurred through religious study groups that helped people reflect on the structural reasons for their poverty. Keck (1992) writes: “It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Catholic Church’s role in providing space for interaction and organization, a communications network, and human rights advocacy during the most difficult years of the authoritarian period” (p. 17). The relationships that priests formed with poor populations during the dictatorship led to the Catholic Church becoming one of the most important actors in Brazil’s democratic transition.

Prior to this period, Catholic priests were involved in “charity projects,” such as food drives, but were not directly involved in more “political” projects (Berryman, 1987, p. 15). However, during the 1960s many clergy in Latin America were beginning to acknowledge that charity could not end poverty, because there were structural inequalities that kept people disempowered and poor. These priests began developing a theology of liberation, based on what became known as a “preferential option for the poor.” The “preferential option for the poor” was understood as a shift in the priorities of the Catholic Church to focus on improving the lives of poor populations. In 1968, at a conference sponsored by progressive priests in Peru, Gustavo Gutiérrez gave a presentation called “A Theology of Liberation.” A few months later the Second Vatican Council of Bishops occurred in Medellín, Colombia, and “liberation theology” was solidified as a political position in the Catholic Church.

Priests following liberation theology began engaging working-class populations in discussions about poverty and power through local study groups, known as CEBs (Base Ecclesial

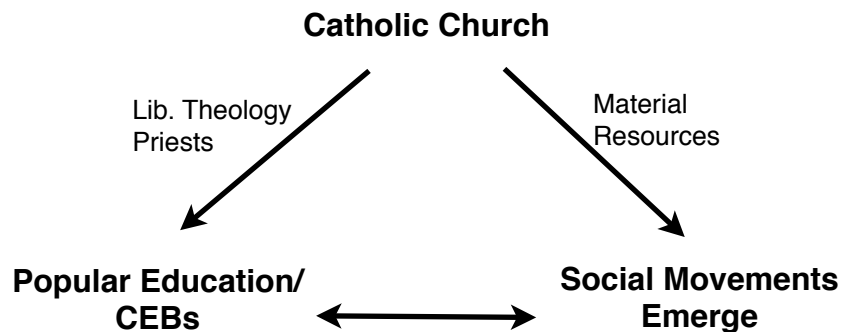
Communities). These CEBs were organized as traditional bible study groups, but the study was based in workers' own experiences and their ability to take political actions to improve their communities (Berryman, 1987, p. 36). The study sessions began by discussing peoples' personal experiences, and then progressed to more macro discussions about structural inequalities, the political economy, and electoral politics. "The Church thus served simultaneously as arena, promoter, and protector for contestatory movements. Particularly in the urban peripheries, there was no other space in which to participate and develop grass-roots leadership" (Keck, 1992, p. 48). In 1981, there were 80,000 CEBs throughout Brazil (Moreira, 1985, p. 177). The mere quantity and diffusion of CEBs, even during a period of dictatorship, is an indication of the Catholic Church's capacity to influence poor populations and to mobilize people to action.

The women's movement that burst into the national consciousness of Brazil during the late 1970s is a prime example of these processes. Feminist scholars have elaborated on the critical role of the Catholic Church in the politicization and organization of poor women:

The progressive church served as an organizational umbrella for the opposition, covering its activities with a cloak of moral legitimacy . . . Many women were changed by participating in the CEBs, redefining themselves as legitimate public actors and modifying the traditional norms that had limited women's participation in the public arena. (Soares, 1995, p. 311)

Religious women who had no previous experience in politics or community organizing began to participate in the CEBs, where they learned about national political developments as well as the historical reasons for poverty in their communities. These working-class women then led the call for a return to democracy over the next decade.<sup>48</sup> Figure 3.1 illustrates these relationship between the Catholic Church, the CEBs, and the social movements that emerged throughout Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>49</sup>

*Figure 3.1: Role of Catholic Church in Political Organizing in Latin America (1960s-1980s)*



<sup>48</sup> Another group directly influenced by the Catholic Church was the oppositional labor movement, arising in the late 1970s. For example, the leaders of the oppositional slates in the metalworkers' union in 1976 were mostly CEB members 1980 (Keck, 1992, pp. 48, 78–79).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>49</sup> In the political process model to social movement research, the role of grassroots educational initiatives in stimulating movement emergence is overlooked. Originally, in 1984, McAdam (1999) introduced the concept of cognitive liberation, which he describes as people beginning to define collectively their situation as unjust and subject to change (p. 34). Cognitive liberation is similar to the educational process I describe above. However, in the second edition of this book, the concept of cognitive liberation is replaced by "framing," a top-down process of naming a struggle to resonate with people. Framing overshadows processes of learning and transformation that occur in educational spaces such as the CEBs.

As Figure 3.1 illustrates, the Catholic Church stimulated the emergence of dozens of social movements throughout Brazil and Latin America, through the CEBs and the priests' educational initiatives. Priests often participated in several different political movements, serving as a coordinating link between activists. Once these movements had their own structures, new activists incorporated popular education into their struggles independently of the church organizations. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educational philosopher, was the primary inspiration for these popular educational initiatives developing within movements and the Catholic Church.

### ***Freire and Adult Literacy***

Paulo Freire is one of the most important educational theorists of the 20th century, making an impact on a range of educational practitioners, progressive teachers, social movement activists, and university professors alike. Freire was born on September 19, 1921, in the Northeast of Brazil, a region of the country known for its extreme poverty and the entrenched power struggles between regional rural elites known as *coroneis* (Andrade, 1980; Nunes Leal, 1977). Nonetheless, the northeast of Brazil also had a rich culture of resistance, and for much of Freire's early adult life (the 1950s and 1960s) poor sectors of society were mobilized—peasants were revolting, unions were gaining force, and agrarian reform was on the national agenda (A. Pereira, 1997)—leading to the military coup in 1964.

Prior to the military coup, Freire spent several decades working with poverty alleviation institutions, first through government agencies and then more directly with his own literacy campaigns. In 1946, Freire started working for the Industrial Social Service agency (SESI), a poverty assistance organization set up during populist President Getúlio Vargas's regime (1930-1945) as a way of helping to relieve poverty, but also to maintain "social tranquility" (Williamson, 1992, p. 419). In retrospect, Freire argues that the SESI only "put obstacles in the way of the working class achieving its own identity" (Gadotti, 1994, p. 6), because people were offered social services that alleviated their suffering but did not change the reasons for their poverty. Nonetheless, the SESI gave Freire his first experiences working with the poor. As he records in personal correspondences, it was through this work that he learned about the relationship between freedom and authority, that baking education had negative effects, and that cognitive processes are never politically neutral (Kirylo, 2011, pp. 27–32). He also realized that the public school system, rather than contributing to the critical thinking ability of students, helped teach them to be passive members of society and to accept inequality.

In the beginning of the 1960's, Freire implemented a series of literacy programs that would make him famous. First, in 1962 Freire organized a project in the state of Rio Grande do Norte in the municipality of Angicos, which taught three hundred rural farmers how to read and write in forty-five days.<sup>50</sup> Then, left-leaning President Goulart invited Freire to implement a similar educational program on a national scale. By 1964, twenty thousand educators in "cultural circles" were teaching two million adults how to read. The goal of this program was both to help people read the *word* through critical literacy skills, and teach them how to read the *world* by reflecting on their social and political context.

This national literacy program was only one of President Goulart's many reforms that began to threaten the interests of landowners, military leaders, urban elites, and international financial investors. As previously mentioned, in 1964 the military overthrew the government. Freire was

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<sup>50</sup> Carlos Alberto Torres was invited to give a plenary speech about these experiences in Angicos at the Comparative Education World Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in June of 2013.

one of the hundreds of government designated “subversives” that was jailed and soon after exiled. After a brief stay in Bolivia, Freire moved to Chile and in 1970, from exile, Freire published his most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002). In this text Freire outlines the oppressive nature of the capitalist education system and offers an alternative method for working with the poor; a pedagogy that allows people to reflect on the reasons for their poverty and think collectively about how to address these issues. Over the next three decades, Freire published dozens of books developing these ideas.<sup>51</sup>

During the same period that Freire was beginning to solidify his educational approach, members of the Catholic Church were searching for a way to address the poverty in their communities. A primary vehicle for this work with the poor was through the CEBs. There is a clear link between the development of liberation theology, the CEBs, and Freire’s educational ideas. For example, the conference documents from the Second Vatican Council in Medellín, which solidified liberation theology as an ideological position within the church, explicitly mention the Catholic’s Church new educational approach: “This education is called education for liberation; that is, education which permits the learner to be the subject of his (*sic*) own development” (Torres, 1993, p. 122) Torres (1993) argues that the language of this document is almost identical to Freire’s previous writings, illustrating the influence that Freire had on the Medellín Conference: “One of the main reasons for Freire’s success was the close relationship between Freire’s early philosophy of education and Catholic thinking” (p. 122). In other words, Freire’s ideas found a home within liberation theology. Thus, even though Freire was exiled in 1964, priests and other activists continued to implement his ideas in Brazil.

Freire also had the opportunity to put his theories into practice while he was in exile. He developed literacy programs in dozens of international contexts throughout his decade-long work at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. In 1975, after the overthrow of the Portuguese colonial government in Guinea-Bissau, the new government invited Freire to implement a new series of literacy programs for rural peasants (Freire, 1978). In other contexts, Freire’s ideas were implemented without his intervention, and often, without a deep reading of his texts. During the civil war in El Salvador (1979-1992), popular education became a widespread practice within the revolutionary forces. Writing about these experiences, Hammond (1998) notes that, “While some who pioneered popular education in El Salvador knew of Freire’s approach and consciously sought to apply it, most had little awareness of it” (p. 200). This illustrates how Freire’s theories *lived* not through his writings but through people’s daily practices; those reading Freire initiated educational programs based on his ideas and others learned from these experiences. Other movements implemented Freirean ideas in a more centralized manner, such as the literacy campaign of the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua (Arnové, 1986), which Freire himself was invited to help coordinate. These diverse experiences cemented Freire’s belief that there is no “Freirean method”; rather, his ideas must be continually reinvented (Kirylo, 2011).

After fifteen years abroad, Freire was allowed reentry into Brazil in March of 1980. He had remained involved in Brazilian politics while in exile, and was one of the founding members of the left-leaning Brazilian Workers’ Party (PT) (McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 136). Consequently, when a PT candidate won the municipal election in São Paulo in 1988 Freire was appointed secretary of education, a position he kept for two years. This was a new challenge for

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<sup>51</sup> The most famous of these books include *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004), *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (2001), *Letters to Cristina: Reflections on My Life and Work* (1996), *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving the Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1998), *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1994), *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (1978).

Freire, as he was forced to think deeply about how to implement his theories of popular education into public school bureaucracies (O’Cadiz, Wong, & Torres, 1998). Under the PT administration, Freire was able to implement several reforms, including massive infrastructural improvements, an inter-disciplinary curriculum, a city-wide adult education program, and a reorganization of school authority that allowed students, communities, and teachers to have more control over their own schools. Scholars argue that remnants of Freire’s initiatives are still present in the schools today (O’Cadiz et al., 1998, pp. 248–249). Freire remained a writer, scholar and activist for the next seven years, until his death in 1997. In second part of this chapter, I discuss in more details the different components of Freire’s educational philosophy.

### **The MST’s Early Experiments with Popular Education**

The MST’s emergence in the early 1980s is emblematic of the relationship between the Catholic Church, popular education, and social movements outlined in Figure 3.1 Many of the current national leaders of the MST—such as Edgar Kolling and Ademar Bogo—were in seminary together in the late 1970s preparing to become priests when they decided to leave the Catholic Church and join the emerging movement of landless rural workers occupying land. For these future MST activists, the decision to become clergymen was not a choice, per say, but rather a lack of other options. Edgar Kolling joined the seminary because public schools in the rural interior only went up to fourth grade, and his parents could not afford to send him to a private school.<sup>52</sup> At the seminary, Edgar was able to finish primary and secondary schooling. It was also through the seminary that Edgar started working with the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), a grassroots organization founded in 1975 that was helping to organize land occupations in the South of Brazil. Edgar remembers his decision to leave the seminary: “I always wanted to work with people, with the most poor. In the CPT, I learned that you do not need to be a priest to work with the poor. As a popular educator I could also do this work.”<sup>53</sup>

Although two of Edgar’s brothers eventually became priests, Edgar became an activist in the MST. His religious mentors were supportive of this choice: “Bishop Gomez of our diocese was a huge organizer of land occupations. He was a spiritual inspiration for us; when we studied theology we went straight to learn in the slums. In this sense we were formed by the church, and the church’s option for the poor.” As Edgar himself acknowledges, his decision to leave the church was a consequence of the historical context in which he grew up: “Liberation theology made us all take the option for the poor. Today it is the opposite, the poor enter seminary to become rich. It was in this historical period that this emphasis on collective formation was present. We are not the products of a personal decision; we are the products of a historical context.”

Thus, the Catholic Church inspired many of the original founders of the MST to contest poverty by occupying land. Activists still refer to the CPT as “mother CPT,” because of its historical role in the movement. As Figure 3.1 suggests, the MST was only one of the many social movements that emerged due to the organizational and ideological support of the Catholic Church. Once formed, MST activists incorporated popular education into their struggle, which activists had learned through their previous experiences with the CEBs. The following story illustrates these connections through one activist’s history with the Catholic Church, the MST, and popular education.

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling November 18, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling November 18, 2010.

### *Salete Campigotto's Story*

Salete Campigotto<sup>54</sup> is commonly known as the “first teacher” in the MST. The daughter of a small landowner in Rio Grande do Sul, she spent much of her youth working on her parent’s farm. After finishing eighth grade in 1972, Salete spent four years teaching first and second grade students. In 1975 she received a fellowship to attend a high school teaching-training program, known as a *magistério* (mastership degree). When she was twenty-five years old, in 1977, she met Father Arnildo Fritzen, an adherent of liberation theology and local political activist, who invited her to participate in a CEB. This informal study group met every week to reflect on religious and political texts. Salete recalls, “It was in the CEBs and through the CPT that I learned a more critical analysis of the reality of small farmers, of the reality of education in Brazil . . . it was through these experiences that I began to question what was happening, that I realized that the way we were constructing the classroom was not helping students reflect on their reality.” In 1979 Salete decided to support one of the first land occupations of the decade, which took place in her region and was known as the occupation of Macali.

In 1981, Salete participated in another land occupation, this time to win land for herself. At this point she was twenty-nine years old and the only person in the occupied encampment with a teaching degree. She describes her initial engagement with education as an activity that grew out of a concrete necessity: hundreds of children running around the camp without any structured learning environments. According to Salete, there were 112 school-age children in the camp and 70 percent of the adults were illiterate. Salete, together with another woman, began to organize educational activities for these children and illiterate adults. However, as Salete emphasizes, they decided not to teach in the same way that they had been taught in the traditional school system. Instead, they began searching out educational alternatives.

Most likely, Salete’s interest in a “different type” of education was not as spontaneous as she describes. Salete already had years of experience experimenting with Freirean educational methods through her participation in the CEBs. Father Arnildo, a proponent of popular education, was one of her political and spiritual mentors. In addition activists from the Central Union of Workers (CUT), the oppositional union movement, had a lot of contact with rural activists and were incorporating many of Freire’s methods into their local leadership trainings. Thus, as Salete and other activists began to search for theorists who could help them construct an educational approach for the camp, they drew on these previous experiences. Father Arnildo and João Pedro Stédile, a prominent intellectual who was involved in the founding of the MST, arranged to have two people from Freire’s educational team visit the camp. Freire had just returned from exile, and was teaching at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), which is why he could not personally come. The couple that came in his place had been involved in several of Freire’s previous literacy campaigns.

Although Salete was familiar with Freire’s educational practices through the CEBs—and would later pursue a post-bachelor degree focused on Freirean pedagogies—at this point her knowledge of his ideas was still superficial.<sup>55</sup> Over a period of eight days, the couple from São Paulo introduced her to the main components of Freirean educational philosophy: building knowledge through generative themes; the use of common language; pedagogical activities based in students’ realities; a critique of the banking method of education; and, the need to educate through dialogue and posing questions to the students. After this training, Salete began

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<sup>54</sup> The information that follows about Salete Campigotto is from a personal interview with her (January 13th, 2011) as well as another interview with her that was published (Tedesco & Carini, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> This is according to her own personal assessment, Interview with Salete Campigotto, January 13, 2011.



to teach the alphabet with words that represented the students' reality, for example, "A" for *acampamento* (camp) or "B" for *barraca* (tent). Then she helped students reflect on each of these words through the questions she posed: For the word camp, she asked: What is a camp? Why are we camped? How do we organize camps? For the word tent, she asked: Why do we live in tents? What other types of construction exist for houses? How do poor people live? How do rich people live? How do landless people live? Salete taught geography by helping students identify where MST camps were located in the region, versus where large landowners had plantations. To learn mathematics, Salete helped the students estimate the size of the camp. Salete experimented with various methods, using Freire as her educational reference.<sup>56</sup>

In 1983, the families living in Salete's camp won the legal rights to the land and an agrarian reform settlement was formed, Nova Ronda Alta. Soon after, the state government agreed to construct a new public school for the community, which became the first public school in the country located on an agrarian reform settlement. Due to her previous teaching experiences—and other municipal teachers' hesitation about travelling to Nova Ronda Alta—Salete was hired as the one teacher for this small rural school. Although it was difficult, Salete claims that working in a public school did not prevent her from incorporating Freirean pedagogies into the classroom:

When you talk about school autonomy, bureaucracy is the same for everyone . . . the attendance sheets, enrollment, budgeting school snacks. More so in a small school where you are the teacher and the principal . . . You have a lot of space to work. I worked during the dictatorship, and our school was very much watched because it was on a settlement, but I never had to stop helping students critically analyze their reality.

This quote illustrates that MST activist's influence in the public school system was present from the very first moment that settlement schools were being built. However, in this early period Salete and other activists' work in the public schools was isolated from the MST leadership's larger discussions about educational strategy and the role of popular education in the movement. In the afternoons, Salete travelled to the local MST camps to be part of these other, informal educational initiatives. As the following section describes, popular education became important for three aspects of the MST's struggle: informally working with children, adult literacy, and leadership training for new MST activists.

### ***Popular Education in the Movement***

The first area that popular education became important was with the children on MST camps. Salete's story about how she first began to care about popular education in the occupied encampments—because of the physical presence of children—is a story told by other activists as well. In the recently published *Dictionary of Educação do Campo*,<sup>57</sup> which several MST activists helped to write, an entry on the history of education in the MST states: "In 1981, the encamped families in *Encruzilhada Natalino* in Rio Grande do Sul realized that the education of infants

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<sup>56</sup> Although some of the pedagogies that MST activists were using are similar to Dewey's focus on experimentalism and democratic education (Dewey, 1938), and certainly the politically-engaged pedagogies that were developed in the Highlander Center by Myles Horton (Glen, 1996), these theorists were not available to the MST at this time. In a conversation about their educational approaches, Freire and Horton discussed the fact that similar educational pedagogies can develop in different locations, without an awareness of each other (Horton & Freire, 1990).

<sup>57</sup> *Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside) is the current name of the MST's educational pedagogies. See Chapter 4 for more details on this re-framing.

would be an issue, a challenge. There was a need to take care of the children in the camps—pedagogically . . . This work was brought forward by the initiative of some teachers and moms present in the camp” (Caldart, Pereira, Alentejano, & Frigotto, 2012, p. 500). Bringing children to the land occupations was critical to the MST’s self-promotion as a family movement. However, this meant that every MST camp was full of hundreds of children who were out of school. The parents of these children, and specifically the mothers who bore the brunt of the domestic responsibilities, did not want their children to spend years without studying. Thus, throughout the south of Brazil dozens of activists began working with popular education as a means of supporting—pedagogically—the children on the MST camps.

A second area that popular education was used was in literacy campaigns, on both MST camps and agrarian reform settlements. Adult illiteracy was a huge challenge in the camps and settlements. As Salete comments, illiteracy rates were often as high as 70 percent among adults. After the founding of the MST in 1984, the movement decided to organize a series of literacy campaigns to address this issue. As Freire’s ideas were originally meant to target adult illiteracy in the Brazilian countryside, his pedagogical approach became a natural foundation for these courses. By the late 1980s these literacy initiatives were receiving national attention. Freire even came to the first day of an MST adult literacy campaign, in the southern municipality of Hula Negra, Rio Grande do Sul.<sup>58</sup> During the early 1990s, UNESCO and UNICEF began funding many of these MST programs (see Chapter 4 for more information on UNESCO and UNICEF). These literacy campaigns raised the political consciousness of settlement families while also offering youth literacy trainers a way to become more involved in the movement.

Third and finally, Freirean popular education methods also became an important tool for internal political training. Almost immediately after the founding of the movement, MST activists created a National Formation Sector that was dedicated to “forming” (i.e., training) new MST leaders. The MST needed activists to coordinate the rapidly expanding movement. At first, the MST collaborated with the left-leaning trade union confederation (CUT), to organize joint leadership courses for both movements. “Eventually, however, the MST decided it was necessary to develop the movement’s own internal leadership training. The idea was to develop the *militantes*’ [activists’] critical awareness by teaching them the basic principles of economics, politics and sociology and by analyzing the praxis developed in the struggle for land” (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 120). The goal of promoting activists with a critical awareness of politics, sociology, and economics is similar to Gramsci’s idea of organic intellectuals. According to Gramsci, organic intellectuals are distinguished not by their profession but by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong. The intellectuals give a social class “homogeneity and an awareness of its own function” and “must be an organizer of masses of men” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 5). The National MST Formation Sector was created to offer this type of political training to activists—using Freire as a theoretical reference for developing educational practices that could promote this type of critical consciousness.<sup>59</sup>

## **Realizing the Importance of Public Schools**

Throughout the 1980s, the MST’s educational initiatives continued to be limited to informal, popular education contexts—which included children’s education, adult literacy programs, and

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Ivori Moraes, November 3, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> When Freire wrote the text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—which is the text most commonly cited by the MST—he had not yet been introduced to Freire’s work. It was not until the late 1970s that Freire was introduced to Gramsci’s writings.

popular education focused on training new leaders for the movement. None of these educational initiatives required MST activists to build relationships with local government officials or school bureaucrats. Even though some of the educators working in MST camps eventually became state and municipal teachers in schools on settlements—such as Salete Campigotto—the MST’s national leadership was not yet thinking systematically about the role of public schools in the movement’s political and economic struggle in the countryside. MST activist Ivori Moraes claims<sup>60</sup> that educators in the camp did not think that their popular education initiatives had anything to do with public schooling. Caldart (2004b) also writes that many MST activists resisted the idea of public education inside the settlements, because they had been previously marginalized and made to feel stupid in schools. Additionally, there was still a tendency within the leadership of the movement to view public schools as an instrument of the capitalist state, which has the sole purpose of reproducing social relations of capitalist production. This perspective—similar to that of the social reproduction theorists referenced in Chapter 2 (Althusser, 1984; Bowles & Gintis, 1976)—convinced most activists to dedicate their energy only to informal educational initiatives. Again, the MST’s investment in popular education outside the public school system was *similar* to dozens of other social movements across Latin America, from the labor movement, to women’s groups, to revolutionary organizations.

Despite the popular education activities that Salete and other activists were organizing, the MST did not have the internal capacity to keep hundreds of children occupied for the entire day. Parents were also worried that their children’s futures would be hurt if they spent years out of school. Branford and Rocha (2002) tell the story of one woman involved in an MST land occupation in 1983, who described the following situation in her camp: “There were hundreds of children running wild, with nothing to do all day long, getting up to mischief. We carried out a survey and found there were 760 school-age children in the camp and 25 qualified teachers among the women. It made sense to set up a school” (p. 114). At this particular camp, the issue came up to a vote in an assembly and the majority of families decided that they should ask the government to set up a public school.

The government authorities had a different perspective. Despite the local government’s willingness to set up a school in Salete’s settlement, by and large local officials initially refused to build new public schools on settlements, claiming the movement’s presence was illegal. In response, MST activists had to occupy government education offices and engage in other forms of protests until their demands for schools were met. Many state and municipal governments eventually caved to these demands. Caldart (2004a) refers to this as the *first phase* of the struggle for public education in areas of agrarian reform: families mobilizing for educational access through direct actions that forced the state to deliver on this public service. This first phase of the struggle also solidified one of the most important aspects of the MST’s educational vision: that public schools should be located in rural areas, not consolidated in urban centers.

Once this demand for access to public schooling was met, the MST leadership had to deal with a new problem: teachers from the cities who knew nothing about the MST or agrarian reform. These teachers even began telling students that their parents were illegal outlaws. Although the government would sometimes appoint a teacher organic to the MST community, as in Salete’s case, most often teachers were appointed who were already part of the official state and municipal teaching network. The MST leadership began to realize that their control over these public schools would be essential to maintaining their influence—what Gramsci (1971)

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Ivori Moraes, October 3, 2011.

refers to as moral and intellectual leadership—among children in the settlements. The educational debate within the movement turned to how MST activists could make schools more sensitive to the needs of the movement. This began what Caldart (2004a) refers to as the *second phase* of the MST's struggle: organizing families to monitor the schools.

The active involvement of local families was critical to the MST's initial influence. Carmen Vedovatto describes<sup>61</sup> her personal experience moving to an MST camp in Santana do Livramento in 1989, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. As soon as she arrived at the camp she was invited to teach, since she already had a high school degree. At this point, the government did not legally recognize the educational activities taking place on the camp. When her family finally won access to land on a new agrarian reform settlement, the local mayor was critical of the MST and did not want to open a school. The families in the camp circumvented the municipal government by putting pressure on the state governor to build the school, a successful strategy. On the first day of the school opening, the community proudly hung an MST flag. This came to the attention of the state education office and they demanded that the flag be taken down. After multiple protests, the community won the right to keep the flag on the school walls. Carmen was appointed the teacher, and the community set up a collective of families to support Carmen in her daily work, and defend her if similar conflicts with the government arose.

Salete tells<sup>62</sup> a similar story about how the community helped her with a legal issue she faced at her school. At that time in the early 1980s, the school was the only building on Salete's settlement with electricity. In the afternoons, after the school closed for the day, Salete allowed the families in the settlement to set up wires to stream electricity from the school to their houses (known as *gatos*). One afternoon, however, several state education officials arrived and saw these illegal wires. They were furious, and left Salete a message to request a meeting, because they were going to legally prosecute her. She did not go to the meeting, and instead, a collective of parents from the settlement agreed to meet the education officials. They explained their decades of suffering to the officials, and asked why they did not deserve to have electricity. They made such a commotion that the education officials sent a letter to the state electricity company, demanding new electric wires in the settlement. Salete remembers this fondly: "I always use this story to show the importance of maintaining a strong community organization. Imagine if I had been alone." Salete and Carmen's stories illustrate that even before a national MST education sector was officially formed, families were already actively involved in the public schools.

### ***The Formation of an MST Education Sector***

The *third phase* of the MST's public educational struggle was the formation of regional, state and national MST education collectives, officially sanctioned by the movement's leadership, dedicated to addressing the issue of public schooling. Caldart (2004a) refers to this phase as the moment when schools were incorporated into the everyday preoccupations of the movement. In other words, this is when public education became a *strategic* preoccupation of the MST.

Even before the National Education Sector was founded in 1987, regional collectives of MST activists were beginning to meet to discuss public education. In almost every settlement there were activists—mostly women—who were drawn to this work. For example, MST activist Marli Zimmerman<sup>63</sup> had her first contact with the movement when she visited her sister, who had participated in a local land occupation. At this time Marli was in her mid-twenties and had

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Carmen Vedovatto, January 5, 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Salete Campigotto, January 13, 2011.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Marli Zimmerman de Moraes, November 22, 2010.

completed eighth grade—unlike her sister who only had a fourth grade education. When Marli arrived at the camp the families realized that she had a higher level of education than everyone else, and they asked her to teach them what she knew. She had no training on how to teach, but she tried her best to help. A few MST leaders visited the camp and saw the work Marli was doing; they invited her to participate in a regional study group. Through these gradual connections, networks of MST educational activists began to develop.

The creation of a National MST Education Sector occurred in 1987, in response to the increasing demands among the families and MST activists already involved in the public educational sphere. Edgar Kolling worked in the MST's National Formation Sector at this time, which he admits was still focused entirely on leadership training for new MST activists. He describes how the issue of public schooling reached the national level:<sup>64</sup> “When we conquered the camps there was a lot of pressure to have schools. The moms and teachers pressured the MST to be concerned with formal education . . . this is why we decided to organize a national meeting of teachers working on settlements in 1987.” As this quote again suggests, the demand for schools was highly gendered, with the mothers on the camp at the forefront of the struggle. This bottom-up pressure from parents led the MST to organize the first “National Meeting of Agrarian Reform Educators” in 1987, in the state of Espírito Santos. This national meeting was an opportunity to share the experiences teachers were having in public schools on settlements throughout the country. These conversations also led to a discussion about the lack of access to secondary education for teachers and the need for more professional training. Edgar remembers, “The teachers had some, but not a lot of pedagogical formation . . . there was a feeling that the MST should have some type of influence in this training.” At this meeting the movement also created a National MST Education Sector, independent from the National MST Formation Sector. The Formation Sector would continue organizing political education for new MST leaders, and the Education Sector would be charged with transforming public schools.

Thus, the MST expanded its struggle from the realm of informal, popular education, to include the formal public school sphere.<sup>65</sup> The MST is what Fernandes (2005) has called a *socio-territorial* movement—not only making demands on the state but also attempting to transform entire geographical “spaces” and make them their own “territories” (p. 30). Socio-territorial movements seek to form social relations in these new territories that support alternative modes of production (Fernandes, 2005, p. 31). As institutions that were built in these territories, the public schools affected the social relations that were developing. The MST activists realized that their struggle to build an alternative hegemony in the countryside would have to involve not only occupying land, but also occupying these public schools.

## **Developing Pedagogies for Schools: Theoretical Foundations**

Once transforming public schools became a central part of the MST's political struggle, the next task for the movement was to develop pedagogies to promote in these schools. The most basic component of this pedagogical approach was the idea that public schools should be located in rural areas and respect rural ways of life, and that teachers should encourage students to continue living in the countryside. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the rapidly growing trend throughout Brazil was to close rural schools and provide transport to urban centers, as a cheap solution to the problem of low-quality education in rural areas (Plank, 1996). This emphasis on

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Another movement concerned with transforming public school is the indigenous movement.

urban schooling was also reflective of the dictatorship's modernization ideology, which assumed industrialization and urban growth to be the most critical aspects of development. Even if there were public schools continuing to function in rural areas, most teachers in these schools were teaching students that their only chance for "success" was to learn the skills necessary to find a job in an urban center. The MST quickly realized that this urban-centric approach to schooling would threaten the future existence of the movement. Thus, the MST's first struggle was to identify a pedagogy that would contest the notion that "quality" education is equivalent to urban schooling, and that rural to urban migration is inevitable.<sup>66</sup>

A second task for the activists in the movement was to identify concrete pedagogical approaches to implement that would support their larger political goals of constructing autonomous rural communities of small farmers based in socialist relations of production. This search for appropriate school pedagogies did not occur in isolation from the other popular educational initiatives being put into practice on camps, or the experiences that teachers such as Salete and Carmen were already having in public schools. The MST built on these previous experiences, while also searching out new theoretical inspirations. The next three sections analyze the most important theoretical foundations of the MST's current educational approach: Paulo Freire, socialist educational theories developed during the early years of the Soviet Union, and organic movement practices.

### ***Freire's Contributions and Limits***

From the very first occupations in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, Paulo Freire was the primary educational inspiration for the movement. There are several themes that are at the center of the philosophy that he developed. One theme is the notion of optimism—what Freire refers to as the "unfinishedness" of human beings. Freire writes that the world is always changing and the future is undetermined; therefore, "insofar as I am a conscious presence in the world, I cannot hope to escape my ethical responsibility for my action in the world" (2001, p. 26). Although not all humans are aware of their ability to change the future, the realization of one's ability to act—what Freire defines as a critical consciousness<sup>67</sup>—is an inherent possibility of our human condition. Another one of the contributions is the idea that education is never neutral; rather, it is always either actively maintaining or changing the status quo. In response to an attack of his literacy programs as being too political, Freire writes that, "the defendants of the neutrality of literacy programs do not lie when they say that the clarification of reality at the same time as learning to read and write is a political act. They are wrong, however, when they deny that the way in which they deny reality has no political meaning" (quoted in, Gadotti, 1994, p. 54). In other words, all texts support a certain political outlook, and it is more honest to be open about one's political position than hide it under the pretext of neutrality. Freire embraces the political nature of his educational proposal, and encourages teachers to openly direct the educational process towards the construction of a more just society.

Another one of Freire's most famous contributions is his critique of the "banking" system of education, which describes an educational process wherein teachers are seen as "depositors" of knowledge into the "receiving" minds of the students. This was the model that he encountered in Brazilian public schools in the northeast of Brazil. Freire (2002) dispels the idea that teachers

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<sup>66</sup> The refrain of a MST song emphasizes this point: "I will not leave the countryside to be able to study. Education in the countryside is a right and not charity." ("Não Vou Sair do Campo," sung by Gilvan Santos in the CD "Cantares da Educação do Campo.")

<sup>67</sup> In Portuguese "consciousness" is "*conscientização*," and the last four letters spell out "action" (*ação*).

are the owners of knowledge and that students are passive in the learning process (pp. 71-74). Instead, he recommends a problem-posing education in which teachers construct knowledge with their students. He writes that, “The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own” (Freire, 2002, p. 81). Problem-posing education is dialogical, meaning students and teachers learn together—although the teacher is still directing the educational process.<sup>68</sup>

Freire also emphasizes that the educational process has to start with students’ previous knowledge. Although student’s previous knowledge is contradictory, and should not be assumed to be an unqualified good in and of itself, this knowledge becomes a basis for a more critical investigation of reality. Students, especially adults, have thousands of life experiences. Respect and engagement for the knowledge acquired through these experiences is essential for any educational program. Freire writes,

It’s impossible to talk of respect for students for the dignity that is in the process of coming to be, for the identities that are in the process of construction, without taking into consideration the conditions in which they are living and the importance of the knowledge derived from life experiences, which they bring with them to school. I can in no way underestimate such knowledge. Or what is worse, ridicule it. (Freire, 2001, p. 62)

If an educational program does not start within the realm of the students’ previous experience, it is intangible and therefore becomes meaningless words, what Freire (2002) famously refers to as “an alienated and alienating ‘blah’” (p. 87).

Finally, one of the most critical but often forgotten parts of Freire’s philosophy is the link between education and political action. At its core, the goal of liberatory education is for students to define collectively concrete actions that they can take to change the world. Freire refers to the relationship between action and reflection as “praxis,” or the “dialectic.” These terms represent a type of thinking that acknowledges the fact that nothing exists in isolation from anything else. The dialectic between learning and acting is important because: (1) realizing that nothing exists in isolation helps students understand how different social forces shape their reality; and, (2) knowing that the world is always changing makes the possibility of action seem more feasible. In addition to outlining general educational philosophies, Freire’s literacy campaigns also produced concrete practices that teachers could use in their classroom. For example, utilizing pictures to codify concepts, breaking down words into their syllabic forms, creating new words out of these syllabi, and teaching words that come out of the community’s vocabulary, are all Freirean approaches to literacy.

The activists who entered the MST in the early 1980s were already familiar with Freire’s work, having both read the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in local CEB study groups and having seen his ideas implemented in practice by radical priests. Freire offered MST activists a concrete way to think about classroom pedagogy—such as the incorporation of generative themes based in students’ reality, problem-posing education, and the role of dialogue in schools. Freire also offered a concrete vision of political change as not only possible, but ethically necessary. He helped activists think about the connection between theory and practice and reflect that no

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<sup>68</sup> This is a common misconceptions of Freire’s work, that teachers are mere facilitators in the educational process. Freire thought the opposite: that teachers have to be clear for what purpose they are teaching.

educational context is neutral. Freire also taught MST activists the critical role of participatory governance, and the pitfalls of vanguardism, an implicit critique of Leninism (Lenin, 1975).

Rosali Caldart emphasized this latter point in a class she was teaching for MST activists. She said, “Paulo Freire taught us that we are the subjects of the process, not objects. He believes in peasant workers. Some revolutionaries thought that vanguards would produce revolution. Paulo Freire taught us that revolution is not through vanguardism, everyone has to be an agent in this process.”<sup>69</sup> The notion that everyone needs to learn how “to coordinate and be coordinated” is a strongly held ideal within the MST. This ideal is not always applied in practice; many of the same MST activists have held leadership positions for several decades, not everyone in the movement feels that their voice matters, and specifically, women were marginalized from national-level decision-making roles in the MST until the mid-2000s.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, the movement does *strive* to create spaces where new activists can take on coordinating tasks. During my field research I met many life-long MST leaders, in addition to dozens of newer activists who joined the movement and quickly took on important leadership roles.

Despite these many valuable lessons that Freire offers, when MST activists started discussing how they should go about transforming the Brazilian public school system, they realized that Freirean theories had limitations. Most critically, Freirean educational experiments were almost always limited to non-formal, popular educational contexts.<sup>71</sup> Activists began to realize that the public school system is more than just a classroom: it is an entire institution with a particular hierarchal structure that exists between government officials, bureaucrats, school principals, teachers, students, and community members. Therefore, despite the fact that Freire is held as the primary theoretical inspiration for progressive school teachers around the world—and especially in the field of critical pedagogy in the United States (Giroux, 2001; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 2003)—MST activists found that Freire alone could not help them transform the institution of public schooling. While not rejecting Freire’s contributions to classroom pedagogy, MST activists began to search out other educational theorists who had thought about the role of public schools in a socialist society.

### ***Finding the Soviets***

In the mid-1980s MST activists began to draw on educational theories developed in the early years of the Soviet Union, specifically the period from 1918 to 1930. How did these theories travel from early years of the Soviet Union, to the contemporary Brazilian context? I argue that the incorporation of Soviet theorists into the MST’s pedagogical approach was not the imposition of an outside theory; rather, activists began to use these ideas because they resonated with practices already occurring in MST camps. The following story illustrates one way in which the “Soviets” arrived in the MST, and why these ideas provided a theoretical justification for the ideals families already held about the relationship between education, work, and cooperation.

On October 29, 1986, fifteen hundred families—several thousand people—occupied Fazenda Annoni, a large plantation in north-central part of Rio Grande do Sul. This was the largest land occupation the MST had yet organized, and it drove the issue of land reform into the national spotlight. Salete—whose settlement was nearby—started travelling on a daily basis in order to work with the children in this new camp. Eleven of the people involved in the occupation already

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<sup>69</sup> Field notes, September 2011.

<sup>70</sup> For more information on these gender dynamics, see Peschanski (2007).

<sup>71</sup> It was not until the late 1980s that Freire had the chance to implement his ideas within the Brazilian school system, and even, it was a short two-year experiment.



had teaching certificates; these teachers, along with some parents, began to form an education collective in the camp. As the occupation of Fazenda Annoni received national media attention, other sympathizers of the struggle also began to visit and offer their support. Among a group of visitors was Rosali Caldart.

In the mid-1980s, Rosali Caldart was a university student in pedagogy, not yet a self-identified MST activist.<sup>72</sup> At Rosali's small university in Rio Grande do Sul there were several professors who specialized in socialist pedagogy and had previously introduced Rosali to the leading educational intellectuals of the Soviet Union. Salete Campigotto tells<sup>73</sup> the story of how Rosali first introduced these Soviet theorists to the teachers in the camp:

In the visit that Rosali made in the 1980s, we were already working in education collectives, and I developed practical activities with the kids, we had a rabbit farm, and the kids took care of the rabbits each day, they learned how to take care of them. Rosali came to see us, and I think she had studied some stuff before because personally I had never heard of Kruspkaya [Vladimir Lenin's wife]. She said to me, school and work . . . the issue of studying, but having responsibility for work, but also studying, this is an issue Kruspkaya wrote about, the connection between work and study. And this is how we began to study Kruspkaya.

In the MST camp everyone was always working—planting food, building houses, taking care of animals. It seemed logical to Salete that her students should also have work responsibilities, which is why she set up the rabbit farm. When Rosali brought Nadezhda Krupskaya's writings to the camp for activists to read, these ideas resonated with the common-sense understanding settlement families held about the importance of manual labor. Activists began to read Krupskaya and other early Soviet theorists. Two Soviet pedagogues in particular became the principle inspirations for the MST: Moisey Pistrak and Anton Makarenko.<sup>74</sup>

#### *Educational Value of Manual Labor – Moisey M. Pistrak*

Moisey M. Pistrak's theories about the educational value of work immediately resonated with MST activists. Pistrak was born in Russia, lived from 1888 to 1940, and was influential in reforming the education system in the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution. In *Fundamentos da Escola do Trabalho*,<sup>75</sup> Pistrak discusses his experiences constructing and implementing a Marxist pedagogical method in primary schools in the Soviet Union. He states: "The revolution and the school should act in parallel, because the school is an ideological arm of the revolution" (Pistrak, 2000, p. 30). Based on this sentiment, Pistrak analyzes how to construct a school that prepares students to contribute to a socialist society. The most important contribution of the book is its emphasis on manual labor as a cornerstone of any socialist school system—a way of teaching the principles of discipline, organization, and collectivity. Pistrak

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<sup>72</sup> Rosali eventually wrote her PhD thesis on the pedagogies the MST developed (Caldart, 2004a). In this chapter I both draw on Rosali Caldart's published writings, and the primary data I collected through several conversations and an interview with her during my field research.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Salete Campigotto, January 13, 2011.

<sup>74</sup> While activists sometimes refer to Krupskaya, Pistrak and Makarenko are more common references.

<sup>75</sup> Pistrak is not widely known in the English-speaking world, and in fact, there are no translations of his writings in English. The first translation of his work into Portuguese was the *Fundamentos da Escola do Trabalho* (Fundamentals of a School of Work) published in 1981. It was not until 2010 that Professor Luiz Carlos de Freytes translated a second book by Pistrak into Portuguese, *Escola Comune* (Commune School), after spending several years in Russia studying Pistrak's educational theories.

writes, “It is necessary to teach love and esteem for work. Work elevates the man and brings him happiness; it educates him in a collective sentiment, it ennobles the man and because of this, work, and particularly manual labor of whatever type, is necessary as a means of education” (Pistrak, 2000, p. 48).

In the introduction of her book, *Pedagogia do Movimento Sem Terra*,<sup>76</sup> Caldart (2004a) quotes the governor of Minas Gerais in the 1920s: “For cultivating land, to dig with a hoe and to take care of cattle it is not necessary to know a lot words” (p. 7). According to this statement some people are destined for manual labor, for which literacy and other intellectual capacities are not necessary. This separation between intellectual and manual labor—what Braverman (1998) refers to as divorcing conception from execution—is one of the defining characteristics of capitalist development in the 20th century. Often referred to as Taylorism, or what Gramsci calls Fordism (Gramsci, 1971, p. 279), this separation rejects the worker’s ability to envision the entire production process, as they become the executor of pre-determined tasks. One of the basic components of the MST’s political project is rejecting the historical separation between intellectual and manual labor on which capitalism has been built.

Rosali remembers<sup>77</sup> that as MST activists began to read Pistrak’s writings, they saw him as engaging in a task similar to their own: creating a formal school system that directly supports a larger socialist project. Pistrak’s theory of a “school of work”—in which students are equally involved in manual and intellectual labor at school—remains one of the pillars of the MST’s educational beliefs. A document on the principles of education in the MST states: “Work has a fundamental value because it is the world of work that generates income, that helps us identify as a class, that makes possible the construction of new social relations . . . . When we say that our education tries to create subjects of action, we mean subjects that are principally workers” (MST, 1996). In other words, as a working-class movement students’ participation in manual labor is critical for the formation of their class identity.

Pistrak offered activists a language to theorize about the practices that were already developing on camps and settlements—such as Salete’s rabbit farm. His writings also helped the MST connect their educational initiatives to those of other socialist societies. The principal concept MST activists take from Pistrak’s writings is that manual labor is a school in and of itself, and should be connected to the other intellectual tasks of the school.<sup>78</sup> Today the MST incorporates these ideas in various ways, from organic gardening and establishing mini-factories in schools, to requiring students to be responsible for all of the cooking and cleaning.

### *Education as Cooperation – Anton Semyonovich Makarenko*

Another core component of the MST’s educational philosophy is the vision of education as the learning grounds for cooperation. An MST publication states: “Most of the time students learn the culture of individualism, of isolation and of conservatism that we carry with us. This is why it is necessary to have an education intentionally based in the culture of cooperation and the

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<sup>76</sup> This is the most extensive discussion of the MST’s pedagogies. In the book, Caldart defines the “Pedagogy of the MST” *not* as something that occurs in schools, but rather, a process of subject formation that takes place in various learning matrices (social struggle, collective organization, working the land, culture, and being an agent in history). She describes the MST as a school where pedagogical learning contexts exist, turning people into “*Sem Terra*”, which she argues is a social identity not simply a material reality. Although I agree participating in the MST is a powerful learning experience, in this chapter “Pedagogy of the MST” refers to the pedagogies activists are attempting to implement in public school.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Rosali Caldart, January 17, 2011.

<sup>78</sup> This assessment comes from dozens of interviews with MST activists, posing this question.

creative incorporation of lessons about the history of the collective organization of work” (MST, 1996). When discussing the importance placed on “collectivity” within the school, MST activists frequently quote Anton Makarenko. Makarenko has become famous internationally for his work running a residence school for hundreds of war orphans after the Bolshevik Revolution, known as the Maxim Gorky Labor Colony<sup>79</sup> (Bowen, 1962; Makarenko, 2001, 2004). His book *Road to Life* (Makarenko, 2001)—*Poemas Pedagogicas* in Portuguese—is a first-hand narrative of Makarenko’s time as the director of the Gorky Colony. This book captured the imagination of hundreds of activists, allowing them to relate Makarenko’s experiences to their own educational initiatives in Brazil.

The goal of the Gorky Colony was to “form” orphans into disciplined revolutionaries who would contribute to the construction of a new socialist society. These orphans were considered by Soviet leaders to be deviants and devoid of norms; however, Makarenko believed that it was possible to develop the personalities, character, and intellect of these students (Bowen, 1962). Makarenko’s solution was the student collective. He argues that students in a collective dispense with their individualism and begin striving for a goal greater than themselves. Makarenko writes that a key aspect of constructing a collective is self-governance—allowing students to oversee daily tasks in the school and determine their own solutions (Luedemann, 2002).

Ever since their first land occupations in Rio Grande do Sul, MST activists have worked with this idea of collective self-governance, both in the organization of daily tasks in the camp and in the agricultural work on the settlements. For example, as soon as a land occupation takes place the first task for activists is organizing collectives of ten families, known as “Base Nucleuses” (*Núcleos da Base*, or NBs), which form the organizational structure of the camp. Discussions that occur in these NBs are the most important decision-making level of the movement, and the goal is for this organizational structure to transfer over to the settlements. Given the use of NBs on settlements and camps, creating collectives of student NBs resonated with MST activists.

The goal of Makarenko’s pedagogical approach is not only to transform classroom pedagogy, but also to reverse the traditional relationship between students, teachers, and administrators. As opposed to students simply arriving in the school and completing tasks that are set out for them, they become agents in determining how schools should function. Student responsibilities include addressing disciplinary issues, constructing curriculum, organizing extra-curricular activities, facilitating discussions, evaluating teachers, and debating about the goals of education.

During a meeting of the state MST education collective in Pernambuco, Makarenko’s vision of the collective was quoted: “The collective is a live social organism, and because of this, it possesses organs, attributes, responsibilities, correlations and interdependencies between its parts. If this does not exist then it is a crowd, a concentration of individuals.”<sup>80</sup> This quote makes an important distinction between a group of individuals and a true collective, the latter of which takes on its own characteristics and attributes distinct from the sum of its parts. By organizing schools into student and teacher collectives, the MST attempts to emulate Makarenko’s vision of collectives as living organisms. Kane (2001) describes this pedagogical approach in the MST: “Students are expected to take collective responsibility for managing all aspects of educational and domestic tasks such as deciding on timetables and curriculum, participating in collective forms of assessment, organizing the cooking and cleaning and running commercial activities for

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<sup>79</sup> This colony was named after a Russian intellectual who Makarenko highly respected. In 1927, Makarenko was appointed the head of another colony for homeless children and adolescents, the Dzerzhinsky Labor Commune, where he worked until 1935. He passed away in 1939.

<sup>80</sup> This quote was on a power point, in a meeting I was observing in Caruaru, PE. (Fieldnotes, July 2009)

subsidising (*sic*) this course” (p. 100). The hope is for students to experience what it means to submit ones individuality to a larger collectivity. These collective responsibilities also helped to break the typical gender norms in society that put the burden of cooking and cleaning on women.

### *A Pedagogical Stew*

The MST has drawn on various pedagogues to develop their approach to formal schooling. At times, however, these theorists seem like stark opposites. For example, Makarenko is concerned with discipline and developing socialist values, while Freire is focused on dialogue, student expression, and a humanistic teacher-student relationship. These differences stem from their philosophical background and political contexts. On the one hand, Makarenko and Pistrak are Marxists, working to spread the success of the recent Bolshevik revolution. The Soviet’s project was that of centralization; of developing and inculcating into people’s consciousness and practice an emancipatory centralized State. Success required discipline, dedication, and the formation of a “new Soviet man” (Cheng, 2009) who submits to the decisions of the vanguard party. On the other hand, Freire is a Catholic, a humanist, and was a writer in exile against an authoritative military regime. Freire’s was a project of de-centralization in contestation to an authoritarian repressive state. In the early 1960s, Freire was openly critical of the centrist Communist Party (Kirylo, 2011, pp. 41–42).

These differences might appear irreconcilable, but MST activists have never felt the need to choose between theorists or schools of thought. Rather, the movement draws on aspects of all of these ideas in their daily practices, creating a form of socialist hybridity. From Makarenko, MST activists take the idea of the collective, the importance of students being the principal organizers of the school system, as well as the idea of in-residence education where students live and study at the school. The MST uses Pistrak to articulate the importance of manual labor and valuing the culture of the working-class. Freire offers the MST a justification for the political nature of their educational approach, and helps them remember to engage in praxis: connecting theory to action. Activists also use Freirean methodologies in their classroom pedagogies, choosing texts that draw on students’ local realities, organizing classes around debate and dialogue, and teaching students about the root causes of poverty in Brazil.

None of these theorists are employed at every moment or with total consistency. I have sat through many MST teacher-trainings that consist of hour-long lectures, not problem-posing techniques. In addition to dialogue, MST activists value a speaker’s ability to synthesize the knowledge she or he has accumulated and share it with them orally.<sup>81</sup> The MST also does not emulate the most military-focused characteristics of the Gorky Colony, such as students marching in columns with military rankings. I have heard MST activists openly critique Makarenko’s extreme authority and his harsh disciplinary punishments.<sup>82</sup> At one point in *Road to Life*, Makarenko becomes so exasperated with a student that he hits him as a form of punishment. In interviews, MST activists often mention this part of the book, expressing disagreement, but also arguing that Makarenko’s theories cannot be thrown away just because of this one incident.

Professor Luiz Carlos da Freytes, the translator of Pistrak’s most recent book published in Portuguese, explains that in Makarenko’s collective he is always present, whereas in Pistrak’s

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<sup>81</sup> However, Freire himself rejects the idea that the teacher cannot lecture. As Aronowitz writes, “against the prevailing wisdom, Freire rejects the idea of a teacher as transmitter of received knowledge. But he also spurns the degraded idea that the teacher is chiefly a ‘facilitator’ of commonsense wisdom and of values clarification” (from introduction of Freire, 2001, p. 8).

<sup>82</sup> This concern with Makarenko’s disciplinary tactics came out in several interviews.

collective Pistrak disappears.<sup>83</sup> These differences offer the MST flexibility in thinking about how to build teacher and student collectives within their schools. In a course for MST activists on the “Pedagogy of the MST,” Rosali Caldart also touched on these differences: “Pistrak was creating a new school for a socialist society . . . Makarenko had a different challenge, the educational process of re-entering children into the revolutionary process. These children had lost their ability to be part of social life, and he was creating a school for these children.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, Pistrak allows activists to think about working with mass-schooling systems, while Makarenko helps activists reflect on how to educate students who feel alienated from Brazilian society—and how to facilitate this indignation into productive channels. For the MST leadership, one “productive channel” is becoming an activist in the movement. Each of these theorists speaks to MST activists for different reasons. As Marli Zimmerman, reflects,<sup>85</sup> “I was drawn to Makarenko because of the population he was working with, the unwanted, the kids who were rejected from society. It was like the *sem terrinha* [little landless ones].” Thus, MST activists refuse to wed themselves to one theorist. Edgar Kolling insists,<sup>86</sup> “We dialogue with intellectuals of Brazil and the world . . . we chose the theorist that helps us to advance in our problems and challenges.”

Finally, beyond picking and choosing from established theories, the MST also incorporates its own cultural and political practices into public schools. The most prominent example is *mística*—a moment of cultural and political performance that can include dance, music, theatre, videos, or other cultural expressions that reflect on past and current political struggles. Willis (1981) defines cultural production as the “creative use of discourses, meanings, materials, practices, and group processes to explore, understand, and creatively occupy particular positions in sets of general material possibilities” (p. 59). Although cultural production for Willis refers to the everyday and mundane cultural practices of students, through *mística* MST activists engage in a more intentional and explicit form of cultural production in their schools. At the start of every school day, before MST meetings, and during social events, MST students organize these performances. Branford and Rocha (2002) explain the concept of *mística* in the following way:

Music and song had been a part of the movement from the very beginning, when progressive Catholic priests had encouraged the families in the camp to reshape Catholic rites to make them relevant to their own struggle and culture. The leaders were already aware of the importance of these activities (which they were beginning to call *mística*) in motivating the *sem-terra* and helping them forge a collective identity. The *mística* expresses the optimism and determination that spring from our indignation against injustice and from our belief in the very possibility of building a new society. For this reason, it isn’t simply entertainment to help us escape from the disappointments and difficulties of everyday life. It is an injection of vitality, which gives us determination and daring so that we can overcome pessimism and push ahead with our project of including the excluded in the liberation of the Brazilian people. (pp. 29-30).

The performance of *mística* helps students collectively remember past struggles of the working-class and other oppressed groups. It is also a critique of the traditional dualism between mind and

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Luiz Carlos de Freitas, January 27, 2011.

<sup>84</sup> Field Notes, September 2011.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Marli Zimermann de Moraes, November 21, 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Edgar Kolling specifically mentions that people often ask the MST which theorist they follow, however, the MST refused to only adhere to one theoretical tradition. (Interview November 18, 2013).

body, inherited from Cartesian enlightenment (Descartes, 1641). By singing the MST national anthem together, or a song that comes from a settlement's rural popular culture, or reciting a poem about other socialist struggles, students *embody* their history and the interconnections between the MST and other political movements. They come together to artistically express a determination to change unjust circumstances. *Mística* occurs at all MST events and meetings. It has become a national MST pedagogy—inside and outside of the schools—to maintain optimism about the possibility for change; and of course, it directly facilitates students' loyalty to the movement. Here is a description of a student *mística* I observed at a high school for MST youth:

First each NB had to announce if everyone in their collective was present, and then each NB led a chant about social justice, raising their left hand into the air. Afterwards the *mística* began, which involved music playing and students coming in with books. They began pulling people into the circles, with these books surrounding them, and reciting a poem about the importance of studying for the revolution. Then some students came in with farming tools, and sang about the role of agricultural production in their struggle, placing the tools in the center of the circle and pulling a bunch of other students into the circle as well. Then they held up the MST flag, along with the Via Campesina and CUT flag and we all sang the MST national anthem. Then their science class began. (Field Notes, July 2009, at the Educar Institute)

In schools located on MST settlements and camps, *mística* has become a daily practice—a normalized way to start every school day. Other organic movement practices have also been incorporated into the public schools, such as the shouting of protest chants (known as “words of order” (*gritos de ordem*)) as a form of roll call, singing the MST national anthem, and participating in local political marches in support of agrarian reform.

Brazilian educational theorist Arroyo (2004) argues that educators have to think about the “cultural matrices” that encompass rural life, and incorporate this culture into their pedagogical project. The MST's incorporation of *mística* and other cultural practices into their schools helps students creatively use local discourses, practices, and symbols to “come to a collective, mediated, lived awareness of their conditions of existence and relationship to other classes” (Willis, 1981, p. 58). This is also an attempt to keep youth in the countryside, by teaching them to value rural life. Thus, while activists draw extensively on Soviet theorists and Freire, the “Pedagogy of the MST” looks quite different than it ever did in the Soviet Union or in other popular education contexts. The Pedagogy of the MST is a hybrid philosophy, locally adapted for the contemporary Brazilian countryside. However, this pedagogy contains many tensions—such as the tension between education as an act of freedom and collective discipline—that are never overcome; rather, they are temporarily reconciled through the MST's concrete practices.

### **Training a “Movement” of Public School Teachers**

This section discusses how MST activists began training a “movement” of public school teachers to work in their communities. These attempts to influence teachers initially occurred through a process that MST activists refer to as “accompaniment” (*acompanhimento*).<sup>87</sup> This involves activists visiting the public schools on a daily basis; helping teachers, students, and community members collectively define their educational goals; and supporting the school

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<sup>87</sup> One of the movement's educational publications is specifically about how to “accompany” schools on settlements (MST, 2001).

community in the implementation of new pedagogical practices. These practices can range from the establishment of student collectives, to planting a school garden, to preparing class lessons that are more relevant for rural communities. By the early 1990s, there were dozens of public schools located in agrarian reform settlements that activists in the MST education sector were “accompanying,” or in other words, offering their help and assistance to the public school teachers in all of their daily tasks. While some of these teachers refused to work with the movement, Salete remembers<sup>88</sup> wining over the majority of teachers in her region to the MST’s cause. For many teachers, the pedagogical support the MST offered went far beyond that offered by the government. As a result, several teachers not previously associated with the movement became dedicated MST activists. Sometimes teachers from the cities were more open to the MST’s initiatives than the teachers living in the settlements. This is why Salete argues that the MST’s ability to influence public schools does not depend on whether teachers are organic or external to the movement; activists’ influence depends on their ability to continually support the public school teachers in a real and meaningful way.

Although local government officials were often initially wary of the MST’s participation in the local public schools, there were some moments when the interests of the MST and the government actually converged. A primary example is the MST’s first teacher training program, which took place in 1990 in the municipality of Braga, in the northeastern part of Rio Grande do Sul. The idea for this teacher-training program came about at the national education meeting in 1987, when concern was expressed about the low level of teachers’ education on settlements. Many teachers in the public school system had not even finished high school. Moreover, in 1990 it was officially illegal to teach without a secondary degree and judicial bodies were beginning to crack down on this law. This threatened the MST’s ability to keep supportive teachers with low levels of education in their schools. A few priests informed MST activists of a high school for nuns in Rio Grande do Sul that was going to close down. The MST went to several municipal governments and teachers’ unions in the region to request financial support for keeping the nun’s high school open in order to turn it into a secondary school for teachers. Many of the local mayors were supportive of this initiative, because they also had teachers without secondary education in their public schools.

Together, the MST, the municipalities, and the unions approached the Foundation of Development, Education, and Research in the Granary Region (FUNDEP), an organization that was already offering educational services to rural areas. The MST education collective in Rio Grande do Sul worked with FUNDEP to develop a proposal for a teacher-training program, referred to as a MAG high school program (*Magistério*<sup>89</sup>). Since the high school for nuns already had government certification, MST activists could use the nun’s school as the umbrella organization for their own program. However, since the MST was not a legal entity, the official coordinator of these high school programs would be FUNDEP’s Department of Rural Education (DER). Thus, the MST’s first teacher-training programs began officially as a FUNDEP/DER project, within the school for nuns. However, MST activists had almost complete control over the program.

The MAG high school program was the first of many formal schooling programs MST activists developed over the next two decades, with legal government recognition. The goal of the MAG program was concrete—“to certify the teachers”—but also to “dialogue about what

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Salete Campigotto, January 13th, 2011.

<sup>89</sup> A *magistério* program is when you receive a secondary and teaching degree simultaneously. It is also known as *nível media*, or more commonly, *normal médio*.

type of school we wanted, and what was the necessary training to develop this relationship between work and school, education, peasant culture, and cooperation.”<sup>90</sup> For the MST, teacher training is not simply about being effective in the classroom; it is also about developing a collective of teacher-activists in the schools dedicated to supporting the movement. Kane quotes an MST publication on the meaning of “training”: “Training is understood as a ‘process through which educators develop the social, political and technical skills necessary for their creative participation in transformatory action carried out by, through or with the MST in the specific area of education” (Kane, 2001, p. 100). In Gramscian terms, the idea is for teachers to become organic intellectuals—what I refer to as the MST’s political society (see Chapter 2)—that offer students “a homogeneity and an awareness of its (*sic*) own function” (Gramsci, 2000, p. 5) as a social class, and prepare them for action.

Other scholars have also discussed the important political role of teachers. Apple (2013) writes about several of these historical figures:

Du Bois pressed for the formation of organic intellectuals who were closely connected to the masses of oppressed minoritized people and who understand what was at stake in the national and international struggles over class and race. Woodson and the activist educators who worked so closely with him sought to provide teachers with the tools and knowledge as necessary to build collective identities among black youth and adults and to strategically deal with dominant hierarchies and ultimately to challenge and transform them. Freire’s vision of an education that fundamentally challenged the very role of teacher and taught, of ‘official knowledge’ and ‘popular knowledge,’ spoke eloquently to a critical pedagogical process whose ultimate goal was indeed reachable if ‘teachers’ committed themselves to collectively to ‘reading and writing the world’ (p. 161).

In all of these cases—from the MST to W.E.B Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and Paulo Freire—the teacher’s principal job is to connect the students to an alternative hegemonic project.

In 1990, the first MAG high school program began. Half of the students in the program were municipal teachers, and half were MST activists working formally or informally in the settlements and camps. The members of the MST education sector who organized the MAG program included many of the activists already working with education over the previous decade: Salete Campigotto, Rosali Caldart, Edgar Kolling, and Isabela Camini.<sup>91</sup> This group was determined to use the MAG high school program to further develop the movement’s educational proposal for public schools. Rosali remembers,<sup>92</sup> “We made a lot of mistakes, but the MAG course had complete autonomy, we could do whatever we wanted.”

The two-year MAG program occurred through what the MST refers to as the pedagogy of rotation (*pedagogia da alternância*),<sup>93</sup> another pedagogical approach the movement had already begun implementing in its leadership trainings. The pedagogy of rotation allows students to live and study together for two to three-month intensive “study periods” (*tempo escola*), and then return home for their “community periods” (*tempo comunidade*), where they engage in local

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Although not mentioned previously, Isabela Camini was another intellectual who worked with the MST in the 1980s and eventually wrote her doctoral thesis on schools in MST camps (Camini, 2009).

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Rosali Caldart, January 17, 2011.

<sup>93</sup> This term, pedagogy of rotation, was first introduced by the Family Agriculture Schools (EFAs), a network of schools that were started by French immigrants in Espírito Santos.



research projects. This organization allowed teachers to complete the program without giving up their teaching responsibilities, since the “study periods” occurred during the holidays.<sup>94</sup> The MST activists “accompanying” the MAG high school program actively incorporated Soviet and Freirean educational pedagogies into the course. For example, when the teachers arrived in Braga nothing was prepared for them—they had to collectively organize themselves into Base Nucleuses (NBs) and divide up the tasks necessary for the school to function. Students also lived together and shared the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and childcare.

The program also incorporated manual labor into the curriculum, requiring students to work in local agricultural cooperatives. Teachers were often uncomfortable with this work, since many teachers personally identified as part of the professional class and spent their days away from the fields in the classrooms. During the community periods, teachers had to put what they were learning into practice, and—like good Freirean practitioners—reflect on these experiences during the next study period. Rosali describes<sup>95</sup> the MAG program as “a laboratory, working with people who were in the classroom and trying to see if this or that worked.” Teachers not only read Soviet and Freirean texts, but also lived these texts in practice.

I interviewed dozens of MST activists who received their high school degrees through the MAG programs. Many of these activists never thought they would achieve this level of educational access. For example, Elizabete Witcel, the current principal of a settlement school near the city of Porto Alegre, only had an eighth grade education when she turned eighteen because her father did not believe girls needed to study.<sup>96</sup> In 1985, she participated in the occupation of Fazenda Annoni and began to teach the 500 or more kids in the camp how to read and write. In 1990, she was invited to participate in the first MAG course. Similarly, MST activist Marli Zimmerman—who had only gone to an MST camp to visit her sister—became an educator for the movement, despite her eighth grade education. She was invited to participate in the second MAG high school program—MAG 2—offered in 1991. Today she is the vice principal of a settlement school.

MST activists who graduated from these programs expressed the important role the programs played in both their understanding of the movements’ educational approach and their political consciousness. Vanderlúcia Simplicio, remembers<sup>97</sup> reading Makarenko and realizing that the MAG program was trying to imitate the Gorky Colony. It was in the MAG program that she first learned the values of collectivity, and its role in the movement’s pedagogical approach. Adilio Perin compares<sup>98</sup> the MAG program to the organization of a settlement, which includes self-governance, cooperatives, and time in the classroom and at work. Marli Zimmerman also recalls<sup>99</sup> that the MAG program was based on a “school as a cooperative” model, with the students in charge of maintaining the school. Ivania Azevedo refers<sup>100</sup> to the MAG program as an “opening of the waters,” where she first learned about the intentionality of education—*a la* Freire—and that an educator must always know for what purpose she is teaching. The common theme in all of these reflections is that the MAG program helped MST activists visualize the

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<sup>94</sup> Although the pedagogy of rotation is almost impossible to implement in public schools, it is a fundamental component of all MST schooling programs outside the public educational sphere.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Rosali Caldart, January 17, 2011.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Elizabete Witcel, November 15, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Vanderlúcia Simplicio, November 9, 2010.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Adilio Perin, November 28, 2010.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Carmen Vedovatto, January 5, 2011.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Ivania Sotilli Azevedo, January 16, 2011.

movement's pedagogical approach—by allowing them to experience it through practice. These activists are now participants, organic intellectuals, in their own schools, teaching colleagues about the MST's educational vision.

In 1993, the MST began offering a second type of high school program in Braga. This program developed because the MST's leadership was beginning to realize that there were other technical needs, beyond teaching, in the settlements. Most critical was the need for activists who had the technical skills to administer the agricultural cooperatives. Thus, the MST created the TAC (Technician in Administration of Cooperatives) high school program, which allowed activists to complete secondary education while earning a technical degree in cooperative administration.<sup>101</sup> Kane describes the differences between the TAC and MAG programs as the following: “While it [TAC] is driven by the same educational principles, its aim is to help people in settlements survive economically. The course centres (*sic*) on ‘co-operative firm management’, mixes ‘education’ with technical ‘training’” (Kane, 2001, p. 101). Edgar Kolling remembers<sup>102</sup> that Makarenko became especially important in developing the TAC high school program. Makarenko's ideas of collectivity, self-administration, and cooperative organization were the basic principles of the program.<sup>103</sup>

### **Building an Educational Utopia – IEJC/ITERRA**

In 1995, MST activists founded their first “movement” school—a private school independent of the public school system that the MST could administer without being affiliated with the church's high school for nuns, or FUNDEP/DER. Initially, the school was an extension of the high school programs in Braga, and in fact, the two MAG and TAC cohorts in session during 1995 were moved halfway through their programs to this new school. The institutional host of the high school programs was a research institution the MST created, known as ITERRA (Technical Institute of Research and Training on Agrarian Reform).<sup>104</sup> The MST was able to convince the State Education Advisory Board to approve the MAG and TAC high school programs taking place through ITERRA, which meant that the movement no longer needed to be under another organization's institutional umbrella. In 2001, the MST pushed for the state government to legally recognize the entire school, not just a few high school programs, and the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC) was founded.<sup>105</sup> However, most MST activists still refer to the school by its original name, ITERRA.

Although the majority of children and youth in MST settlements and camps still access primary and secondary education through the public school system, the establishment of IEJC has given the MST an opportunity to solidify its pedagogical approach—and its unique mixture of Freirean, Soviet, and organic cultural practices—in a space where activists have complete autonomy. For the MST, the IEJC is an educational “utopia”—a vision for education that might never be realized in the public schools but gives activists something concrete they can strive for. I asked dozens of activists if it was possible to have an educational experience similar to IEJC in

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<sup>101</sup> High schools that also offer technical degrees are common throughout Brazil.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>103</sup> Edgar also mentions that Clodomir Santos de Morais, who helped organize the peasant leagues, was one of the key people who helped the movement theorize how to use Makarenko in these TAC programs.

<sup>104</sup> ITERRA (*Instituto Técnico de Capacitação e Pesquisa da Reforma Agrária*/Technical Institute of Research and Training on Agrarian Reform) is the name of the educational entity that originally hosted the TAC and MAG programs before IEJC was established.

<sup>105</sup> The school was named after the Brazilian Marxist geographer who wrote *Geography of Hunger* (Castro, 1952).

public schools on their settlements, and across the board the answer was “probably not.” Activists brought up a series of barriers to the implementation of IEJC’s pedagogies in public schools, such as the direct oversight of unsympathetic government officials, the shorter school days, the bureaucratic requirements about disciplinary organization, the lack of infrastructure for gardening, and the rotation of teachers in and out of the schools each year. Nevertheless, this is the definition of a utopia. As Leonardo (2003) writes, “Utopia is a concept that educators depend on and which becomes indispensable in their search for theories and practices that are viable as well as defensible” (p. 504). The educational experiences at IEJC offered MST activists a concrete set of theories and practices they could take with them to their public schools, despite the unlikelihood that these ideas would ever be fully realized.

IEJC is located in Veranópolis, a relatively wealthy city of Italian and German immigrants located between the mountains in the northeast part of Rio Grande do Sul. The city is not the most likely place for an MST school—it is most widely known for having the highest life expectancy in Brazil, and for its delicious wine—not its progressive politics. However, the Catholic Church owned a large building in the center of this city and agreed to give the MST a twenty-year lease to use this space, for free. Although technically a private school, the idea was for MST activists to search out public funds and donations to offer secondary education for free to students living on settlements and camps across the country.

The school is organized around different cohorts of 40 to 60 students who study together in different programs for three or four years. While the teacher-training (MAG) and cooperative administration (TAC) programs have remained permanent offerings within IEJC—in 2011 the MST was graduating their fifteenth and twelfth cohorts of these programs, respectively—other high school programs have also been offered. These include popular communication, community health, and accounting. Similarly to Braga, students from around the country come to IEJC to study for a few months and then return to their communities to develop local research projects between study sessions. In any given month at IEJC there are two or three program cohorts present—between 80 to 150 students—which is the minimal number of students necessary for the school to continue functioning.

Cleide Almeida, one of the nine MST activists in the coordinating collective of IEJC, explains that when the school was first founded there was a big debate about whether the MST should be putting resources into professional training.<sup>106</sup> Many activists argued that this was the job of the government, not civil society. In the end, Cleide says that these activists realized that the MST was in dire need of people who could do the technical work required for the settlements’ survival. If the movement did not train these professionals, outside professionals with no notion of the political vision of the movement would come to the settlements to fulfill these technical needs. Therefore, the MST decided to create IEJC with three interconnected pillars: 1) Political Formation—to train new activists; 2) Technical formation—to attend to the technical needs of the settlements; and, 3) High school access—to raise the level of education among the settlements and camps.

### ***Putting Pedagogy Into Practice: My Experience at IEJC***

When I visited IEJC for the first time I was struck by the impressive physical structure of the school. On the first floor there are administrative offices, a large dining room and kitchen, and a well-kept library with over 23,000 books. On the second and third floors are dormitories where students sleep. In the basement there is a bakery to make bread for the school, and a factory to

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Cleide Luncks Almeida, June 15, 2009

produce jams to be sold—teaching students how to manage small industries. There is a day care center at the school, and everyone takes turns babysitting, whether or not they are parents. While Monday through Saturday outside employees prepare the meals, on Sundays the students are in charge of cooking. Beyond manual tasks, students also have rigorous study schedules and classes all day, Monday through Saturday.

In the front of the school is a large garden where most of the food that the students eat is produced. As for the meat supply, IJEC has a partnership with a local farm that gives the school pork and beef, in exchange for students' work on the farm. The MST also raises money through what is called a *mutirão* in peasant culture: a joint effort or community project that requires the effort of a whole group. For example, while I was in a course at IEJC we all participated in a *mutirão* to clear a hillside for planting. We spent five hours chopping down small trees, bushes, and weeds with machetes. The idea was for students to learn the value of manual labor—a *la* Pistrak—while also contributing financially to the school. Although IEJC receives some private and public funding, additional fundraising is critical to keep the school open.

The course I was participating in was a one-month course on the “Pedagogy of the MST,” held at IEJC in September of 2011. Although most programs that take place at IEJC are degree programs, this one-time course was a new non-degree initiative. The MST education sector created it as an opportunity for MST activists already working in the education sectors to reflect on their educational practices. The course also allowed these activists to experience first-hand the MST's utopian example of formal schooling. The four-week curriculum included lessons on the history of the MST, the agrarian question, different aspects of the MST's educational work, debates about settlements, internationalism, socialism, and the pedagogy of the oppressed.<sup>107</sup>

In my two weeks in this course, I learned a countless number of lessons about these topics. However, the most important lesson I learned was about the organizational structure of the school itself. This “governance” of IEJC is what activists call an “upward” and “downward” democracy, similar to Makarenko's Gorky Colony. When I arrived, I was immediately placed in a Base Nucleus (*Núcleo de Base*, NB) of 10 students, which allowed me to be part of this organizational structure. My NB was called NB Oziel Alvez—named after an MST activist that had died in a land occupation. The other NBs were NB Paulo Freire, NB Anton Makarenko, and NB Haidee Sontriza. Each NB had two coordinators, intentionally one man and one woman,<sup>108</sup> who participated in the CNBT (Class Collective of Base Nucleuses). If a problem arose within our NB that could not be resolved, our coordinators raised the issue at the CNBT meetings that occurred each day. At these CNBT meetings the NB coordinators *shared* the conversations that took place in our NB; they do not speak on their own behalf. If there was a question for the class to decide, such as extending the due date of a homework assignment, this question was first raised within each NB. We had to come to a consensus among our NB members before sending our coordinators to the CNBT meeting to make the final decision.

Also participating in these CNBT meetings is a member of the CAPP (the Collective of Pedagogical-Political Accompaniment), a “governance” collective that includes nine experienced MST activists who help administer the school. The MST leadership rotates activists in and out of the CAPP for several years at a time. Within the school, the CAPP functions like another NB,

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<sup>107</sup> MST Document: Instituto de Educação Josué de Castro, IEJC: Curso Nacional de Formação *Pedagogia do Movimento Sem Terra*, Veranópolis, RS, September 1-30, 2001, “Play of Study.”

<sup>108</sup> This gender parity was not always the norm in the MST, and only began to change in the mid-2000s when women began protesting the male dominance in the movement and threatening to form their movement. See Peschanski (2007) for an analysis of this history.

with daily work responsibilities. One CAPP member is assigned to “accompany” each of the cohorts present at the school. While I was at IEJC there were two programs taking place: the TAC 12 (the twelfth cohort of the TAC high school programs that started in Braga in 1992), and the “Pedagogy of the MST” course. The CAPP coordinator who “accompanied” our course was an MST activist named Ivori Morais, who is also a member of the statewide education collective in Rio Grande do Sul. At our cohort’s daily CNBT meetings, Ivori shared all of the information he received from the CAPP about the school, such as a delegation of teachers from Pernambuco that would be visiting the following day. Our two NB coordinators at this CNBT meeting would then share this information with us, and ask for our thoughts and concerns. In this way, information descended to us every day, and our concerns would ascend back up to the CNBT. Although this did not work out perfectly in practice—and students often complained about the slowness of the process and that the final decisions were not reflective of their personal viewpoints—it was certainly an *attempt* to construct a more democratic decision-making structure than most schools.

Generally, all program-specific issues are decided in the CNBT. However, if an issue arises that affects the rest of the school, such as a request from an NB to have a school-wide party with music, food, and dance from the Northeastern Brazilian region, this issue “ascends” to a school-wide collective that includes members of the CAPP, two members of our CNBT, and two representatives from the CNBTs of the other programs present at the schools. However, before any decisions can be finalized by this school-wide collective, the debate has to “descend” again to each of the NBs. Through this process, an issue that arises in an NB in another program will ascend to the school-wide collective and descend to the NBs in all of the other programs, through the mediation of the CNBTs. Therefore, everyone participates in all decisions that affect them at the school, through their NBs. As one CAPP member, Diana Daros, explains<sup>109</sup>: “The NBs do not make decisions, they are part of a collectivity of the class, and the class can take a position, but it is also part of a collectivity with the other programs and the work units. Everyone has to discuss, and the process demands a lot of work, but it ensures that we address everyone’s concerns.” Finally, every month there is a general assembly where students and educators come together to publically evaluate the events of the previous month.

As Diana alluded to, in addition to being part of a NB students also participate in a work unit (*unidade de trabalho*), which does not overlap with the NB and can include members of different program cohorts. These “work units” are different than the cleaning and cooking tasks that NBs are also responsible for completing each day. In addition to this *school-maintenance* work, students also have to participate in *productive* manual labor processes, which Pistrak describes as integral to any socialist educational experience. The work units at IEJC include an agricultural production collective (taking care of the school garden), a bakery collective (baking bread for the school to eat), an industry collective (maintaining the jam production factory), a culture and art collective (producing artistic ornaments that can be sold at the school), and several others. While I was at IEJC I was assigned to the culture and art collective, despite my complete lack of artistic skills, because that was the collective in need of the most extra help.<sup>110</sup> Each day I spent two hours helping the collective to create decorative ornaments we could sell to raise money. Below Figure 3.2 illustrating the IEJC governance structure for the Pedagogy of the MST course.

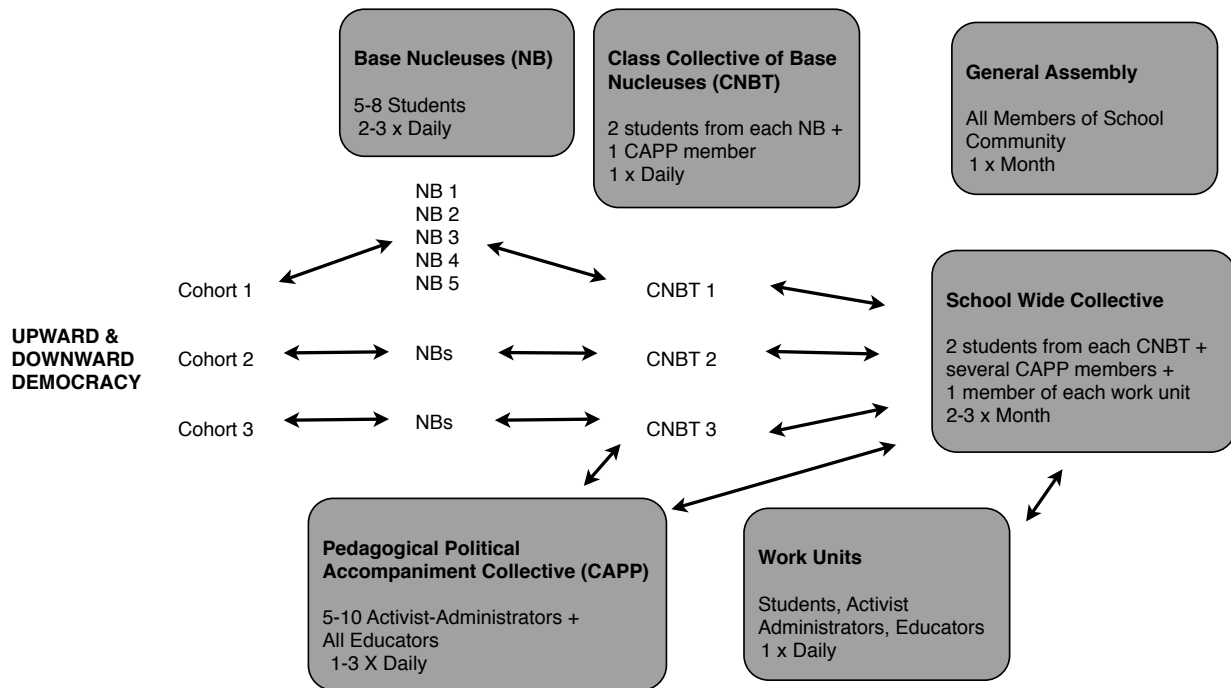
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<sup>109</sup> Field notes, September 2011.

<sup>110</sup> Initially, students’ membership in the collectives was decided based on personal preference or “inclination” towards a certain collective. However, in a longer, several-year course students will rotate through all of the different collectives during their time as an IEJC student.

Figure 3.2: Governance Structure of the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC)

\*Numbers of Cohorts, NBs, and Work Units Vary



Briefly, I will describe one day in my life as a student at IEJC. This was Monday, September 26, 2011, day eight of my two-week participant observation in the Pedagogy of MST course. In order to squeeze in my daily run, I had to wake up at 6:00 AM and sneak out the kitchen doors—where an NB was already busily preparing our breakfast. Arriving back at 6:40 AM, I quickly took a cold shower in the collective women’s bathroom, and then dressed, made my bed, and helped my roommate sweep our floor. We rushed to breakfast at 7:00 AM, which consisted of the bread the bakery collective had made the previous day, and several types of jams that were being produced at the school. At 7:30 AM sharp a bell rang, and we all walked into a big open room where a NB had set up a *mística* to present. The *mística* that day was a celebration of Anton Makarenko. Members of the NB had red cloth wrapped around their clothes, with different words written on banners taped to their chests: study, work, collectivity, humanism, division of labor. There were several MST flags placed on the ground in a circle. Each member of the NB entered, read a brief passage from Makarenko’s book that related to the word on her or his banner, and picked up one of the flags. As each flag was picked up, Makarenko’s face appeared, which the members of the NB had designed on the ground with black beans and white rice. A half sun had also been designed with corn flour above Makarenko’s head. Each member of the NB placed their book between the rays of the sun after reading their poem. At the end of the *mística*, we all sang the MST national anthem with our left arms pumping in the air.

After the school-wide *mística*, the coordinator of each NB announced the presence of everyone in the collective. For example, my coordinator shouted, “NB Oziel Alves present and ready for the day.” Then, the memory collective—whose pedagogical purpose is to record all of

the events, activities, and lessons that take place in the school in order to help students remember what they have learned and the processes they have gone through—reviewed all of the events that had occurred the previous day. The disciplinary collective, whose purpose is to cultivate student-initiated self-discipline and responsibility among the students—announced that all of the rooms were clean, I smiled with relief at my roommate. Then we rushed off to class, beginning sharply at 8:00 AM.

At the beginning of our morning class the NB in charge of coordinating that day—NB Paulo Freire—led us in singing a song about education in the countryside, and then asked each NB coordinator to announce if their entire collective was present. Then, NB Paulo Freire introduced the teacher for our class that morning. This morning, an MST activist from Paraná, Alessandro Mariano, had come to speak with us about the nature of schools and schooling in Brazil. He helped us to reflect on the nature of schooling in our own communities, and we did several small-group assignments. We had a brief 15-minute break at 10:00 AM, when students from both programs met downstairs to eat some freshly baked *pastels* (similar to meat empanadas), and relax. At 10:15 AM we were back in the classroom, until lunch at 12:30 PM. After lunch there was an hour-long break—except for our NB that was responsible for washing the lunch dishes that day. Other NBs had been responsible for preparing breakfast, cleaning the bathrooms, washing the floors, and completing other tasks at different points during the day. At 2:00 PM all of the students headed to their “work units,” and I spent two hours cutting circles out of wood planks for other members of my collective to create wall decorations—with seeds and dried leaves they collected from around the school.

Our afternoon class began at 4:00 PM, and this time a MST activist from São Paulo had come to talk to us about the role of infant education in the movement, and the notion of *cirandas*—childcare intentionally organized to promote the movement’s values in young infants. At 7:00 PM we ended class for dinner, and then at 8:00 PM we all had mandatory NB meetings. Our NB coordinators updated us on the news from the CNBT meeting that day, which they had somehow found time to meet between the day’s activities. Then we spent two hours listening to each other’s assignments from that week, which were written reflections about their experiences in the course thus far. One woman in our NB refused to read her assignment to the group. The other group members claimed that she was not adhering to her collective responsibility. She became noticeably defensive, stating that, “Even with the collective, there is space for individuality.” The other group members eventually let her opt out of the activity. This brief interaction illustrated some of the tensions that arise daily in the collective-orientation of IEJC, when individuals refuse to participate. Sometimes these individuals are sent to face the student-led disciplinary collective to explain their actions, but often these manifestations of individual choice are over-looked. By 10:15 PM, it was difficult to keep my eyes open. We ended our NB meeting, and I went back to my room to complete another homework assignment, and also attempt to write-up my field notes from that day. I went to bed looking forward to the party our cohort was going to organize on Saturday evening, which would be a chance for all of us to relax. But before Saturday night, we had to make it through five more days of the same routine!

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Like the MAG programs in Braga, studying at IEJC is an incredibly formative experience for students—giving them both professional and technical skills, and training them in the educational and political philosophies of the movement. In my short time at IEJC, I learned the

value of discipline, collective responsibility, comradeship, and rigorous study, in addition to reading and reflecting on the shift to financial capitalism in Brazil, ways of organizing cooperative agricultural production, and the foundations of the pedagogy of the MST. I experienced Makarenko's theories by being a member of an NB, which became my most important vehicle for participation in the course. I learned about Pistrak's theories in practice through my daily work cleaning the school, participating in my work unit, and spending an entire day clearing several square miles of a hillside with my classmates. I interacted with Freire's theories in the classroom, through group activities and reflections, and was continually reminded of the role of the course in the larger political struggle of the movement.

Izabela Braga, who spent more than seven years studying at IEJC—first as a MAG student and then in a post-secondary<sup>111</sup> pedagogy program—says<sup>112</sup> that while she was at IEJC she internalized the teachings of Pistrak, Makarenko and Freire. She quotes a statement from Makarenko, which was always repeated among students at the school: “Those who do not work, do not eat. No, that is a lie. Those who do not work should not have the right to eat.” Izabela believes this quote emphasizes the importance of work at IEJC. She says that there is always time built into each day at IEJC for study and for work, and that this manual labor is just as important as studying. Izabela says this is important to her, because when she was in the kitchen cooking a meal for 200 people she knew another group was cleaning the bathrooms, or washing everyone's clothes, or taking care of the children so the parents could study.

More than 3,000 students have graduated from IEJC in the last fifteen years.<sup>113</sup> Although not all IEJC graduates are currently connected to the MST, many of the activists I met over my seventeen months of field research graduated from a program in this school. At the IEJC's fifteenth anniversary celebration, in October of 2010, hundreds of graduates were present and invited panelists expressed the critical role IEJC has played in training MST activists with technical skills.<sup>114</sup> Whether these students graduated with a degree in teaching, cooperative administration, popular communication, or community health, their political formation and technical training contribute to the MST's struggle for socialism in the Brazilian countryside.

In addition to graduating thousands of activists, IEJC also has a critical role in the transforming public schools on MST settlements. As a real utopia (E. O. Wright, 2013)—the IEJC allows activists to “envision the counters of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals,” so that activists can implement these ideals in schools in their own communities. The educational process at IEJC is inevitably imperfect. However, the autonomy MST activists have had at IEJC to solidify the movement's pedagogical approach to formal schooling—despite the contradictions—has provided activists with a (utopian) vision of the type of public education they strive to create. This utopia includes components that might be questionable to the larger Brazilian public and other notions of progressive education. These controversial components include extremely strict discipline, mandatory work schedules, celebrations of socialist struggles, and political discussions. However, activists unapologetically support these pedagogies as part of their attempt to link public schools to the construction of an alternative hegemony in the countryside.

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<sup>111</sup> As mentioned previously, this post-secondary program was administered through PRONERA. See Chapter 5 for more information on this federal program.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Izabela Braga, November 24, 2010.

<sup>113</sup> This number was told to me during a visit to IEJC in the July of 2009, and is probably a low estimate.

<sup>114</sup> Field notes, October 2010.



## Conclusions: Recognition and Expansion

By the mid-1990s, the Pedagogy of the MST garnered ample public support across Brazil. This attention was due to both the educational initiatives MST activists were implementing on settlements and camps, and the priority the movement put on producing written texts about these experiences—a process they refer to as systematization (*sistematização*). One of the MST's first educational texts, published in 1990, is called "Our Struggle is Our School" and includes several testimonies of teachers working in the settlement schools throughout the 1980s. Students in the MAG teacher training programs in Braga were also required to record and analyze their experiences in a series of notebooks that were published. Another important text was written in 1991, when public education appears for the first time as a central political goal of the movement—illustrating that the concern for public schooling went beyond activist-parents and teachers. In 1996 another document was published, "Principles of Education in the MST," which is a reflection of more than a decade of the MST's educational experiences on settlements and camps. Finally, in 1997 MST activists wrote a "Manifesto of Educators of the Agrarian Reform to the Brazilian People," which succinctly outlines the MST's core educational values (see Appendix A).

How did the MST's popular educational initiatives in the early 1980s turn into a coordinated attempt to transform the rural public school system by the mid-1990s? There are several arguments that come out of this chapter, which provides an answer to this question. First, it is clear that the MST's incorporation of Freirean popular education within their movement—and MST activists' relationship to the Catholic Church—was *typical* of social movements at that historical moment, *not* unusual. Today, the MST continues to incorporate popular education, *a la* Freire, into various contexts: working with children in the occupied encampments, implementing adult literacy campaigns, and organizing political trainings for new and old activists.

Early on, however, the MST also began to care about public schooling. This leads to the second argument of the chapter. Unlike other movements, the MST is a *socio-territorial movement* (Fernandes, 2000, 2005), attempting to transform the social relations of an entire geographical area. Since new public schools were constructed within "MST territories"—and these schools were contradicting the social relations activists were trying to promote—it became necessary to occupy this school system.

The third argument in this chapter concerns how the Pedagogy of the MST developed. The MST activists who began thinking about public schooling already had experiences with Freirean education, which influenced their ideas about formal schooling. However, these ideas were primarily concerned with *classroom pedagogy*, not schools as institutions. This forced the movement to search out other theorists. During this process the MST was influenced by outside intellectuals; however, the ideas that stuck with the movement were those that resonated with values already being promoted within the settlements and camps—such as collectivity and the value of manual labor.

Fourth and finally, it was not enough simply to theorize about public schooling, the movement needed to experiment with these theories in practice. However, this was difficult because of the bureaucratic constraints of the public school system. Thus, in order to solidify their approach to formal schooling and prepare teachers to work in public schools, activists created teacher-training programs outside of the public school sphere. These "movement schools" became laboratories for the construction of the Pedagogy of the MST. Teachers and activists who passed through these schools—*living* the movement's pedagogy for several years at a time—graduated with a clear, albeit utopian, vision of the public school they are trying to

construct in their own communities. These graduates then went home, attempting to implement aspects of this real utopian experience into their own public schools. The next chapter analyzes how the Pedagogy of the MST, in less than a decade, went from these experiences in MST communities into the federal government's official approach to rural schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the implications of this process of appropriation.

## Chapter 4: From Local Experiences to National Recognition: The Hegemony of *Educação do Campo* in the Ministry of Education

In this chapter, I explore how the MST's educational proposal was institutionalized within the Ministry of Education, between 1998 and 2012, through a series of laws, a presidential decree, a new office in the Ministry of Education, an advisory board for activists, a congressional committee, and a series of programs that state actors developed in the name of these educational demands. I explore the tensions inherent in this process of institutionalization, the implications of the partnerships necessary to cultivate this type of change, and the degree to which activists maintained their original goals. I also analyze the changing nature of the federal government and the new agrarian context in the twenty-first century, and how this political and economic context affected the institutional trajectory of these educational demands. I end by arguing that *Educação do Campo* has become embraced by a new hegemonic bloc in Brazil, which serves to reproduce the dominant relations of production—in direct contrast to the MST's original goals.

### *Hegemony, Institutionalization, and State-Society Relations*

By the early-1990s, the MST was already deeply embedded in the public educational sphere. Activists were collaborating with municipal governments to improve educational practices, helping to train teachers to work in schools on MST settlements and camps, publishing texts elaborating on the movement's educational ideas, and partnering with local universities to run literacy campaigns. The MST's educational approach, known as the "pedagogy of the MST," garnered increasing recognition among left-wing groups. These practices were similar to the non-formal (popular) educational programs that many other social movements throughout history have incorporated into their struggles (Altenbaugh, 1990; Arnove, 1986; Berryman, 1987; Glen, 1996; Kane, 2001; Morris, 1984; Payne & Strickland, 2008; Payne, 1997). However, the MST was not only concerned with non-formal education but also *formal* schooling. The MST wanted students to be able to pursue legally recognized primary and secondary degrees through the movement's alternative educational approach. During the first half of the 1990s the MST successfully won this legal recognition, allowing activists to pursue degrees through MST-administered programs (see Chapter 3). In 1995, however, these educational initiatives were still isolated practices that only took place within MST communities. Activists had not yet discussed the implications these practices held for the entire rural public school system.

Over the next decade, between 1995 and 2005, the MST's educational initiatives transformed from a set of isolated practices in agrarian reform communities, to a nationally recognized pedagogy for all rural areas, known as *Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside). A national coalition of grassroots movements, union federations, and university professors came together to support these ideas and actively worked with the government to implement them in practice. Within another decade *Educação do Campo* not only gained recognition nationally but also became institutionalized within the Brazilian government's state bureaucratic apparatus as the Ministry of Education established its own *Educação do Campo* office. In 2010, President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva signed a presidential decree giving *Educação do Campo* more legal force, and in 2012 President Dilma Rousseff announced a multi-Ministry federal program that would put this presidential decree into practice. The MST still actively participated in these debates but was now only one of the dozens of groups laying claim over the meaning, content and purpose of these educational ideas. *Educação do Campo* had not only been institutionalized, it had also become hegemonic.

In referring to hegemony, I draw on Gramsci's definition of the term as a combination of both coercive force and cultural-moral leadership, the former of which is overshadowed by the latter at certain historical moments (Gramsci, 1971, p. 258 and 263). As Gramscian scholars have made clear, hegemony is rooted in an economically dominant mode of production and is defined by an expansion beyond economic interests into the political sphere through class alliances (Forgacs, 2000a, p. 423). Gramsci (2000) writes, "though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity" (pp. 211-212). Therefore, in referring to the "hegemony of *Educação do Campo*," I am not only analyzing how the educational philosophies of *Educação do Campo* became common sense<sup>115</sup> for a multi-class coalition, but also how this new moral leadership continues to support the dominant—capitalist—mode of economic production in Brazil, despite the philosophy's socialist origins.

In this framework, the current hegemony of the MST's educational ideals represents two phenomena: (1) a successful war of position—whereby MST organic intellectuals acted as "constructor[s], organiser[s], and 'permanent persuader[s]'" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10) in the "trench-systems" of civil society, convincing dozens of other civil society groups to support their educational ideas; and, (2) a passive revolution, "one of the convoluted, sometimes unintended, ways the dominant sectors establish willing consent ('hegemony') for their rule" (Tugal, 2009a, pp. 3–4). This latter process is not simply co-optation; it also succeeds in transforming material realities—in this case, for thousands of students in the Brazilian countryside—while reinforcing class alliances and producing stability for the dominant mode of production.

Three principal actors—one state institution and two civil society groups—helped transform *Educação do Campo* into the hegemonic pedagogy for rural education: the MST, the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), and the Ministry of Education (MEC) under the Workers Party (PT) government. Dozens of additional civil society and state actors became important at different moments, including UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, university professors, and post-2011, the National Confederation of Agriculture (CNA)—a large agribusiness lobby. Initially, however, the relationships that developed between the MST, CONTAG, and the MEC defined the type of institutional transformation that took place.

The first part of this chapter analyzes the relationship that developed between the MST and CONTAG, and the decision MST activists took to re-frame their educational proposal as relevant for all rural populations. This process of "frame alignment" (Snow et al., 1986) succeeded in "resonating" (Snow & Benford, 1988) with other civil society groups—including CONTAG—but also had deep implications for the MST's ability to control the content of these educational goals, as CONTAG activists internalized the struggle and gave their own meaning to the educational proposal. The contentious partnership that developed between the MST and CONTAG—organizations with distinct historical trajectories, contrasting political strategies, and competing membership bases—succeeded in pressuring the federal government to pass legal guidelines supporting *Educação do Campo* in 2001.

The second part of the chapter analyzes the process of institutionalizing the proposal for *Educação do Campo* within the Ministry of Education, during a PT government. This posed a new set of barriers for both MST and CONTAG activists, such as overcoming systems of bureaucracy and hierarchy; continuing to participate in programs that were rapidly expanding; and contesting the imposition of "global best practices." These intuitional constraints were not

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<sup>115</sup> This does not refer to "good sense," but rather, Gramsci's notion of common sense as "ambiguous, contradictory, and multifaceted" folklore philosophy (Santucci, 2010, p. 139).

easily overcome, and consequently many of the MST's educational goals were indeed de-radicalized. Meanwhile, *Educação do Campo* was also becoming common sense in the national discourses surrounding rural education. The last part of this chapter analyzes the current hegemony of *Educação do Campo*, and how this process has both increased the reach of these educational ideas and diluted their original aims. Given the PT's lack of political capacity and/or will to implement agrarian reform, and instead, the government's decade-long support for agribusiness,<sup>116</sup> I assess the consequences of this new educational hegemony under the current economic model in Brazil.

## **From Local Experiments to National Recognition**

### ***Powerful Allies: UNESCO, UNICEF, and University Supporters***

The MST began to participate in the public educational sphere in the early 1980s out of a concrete necessity: the existence of thousands of children and youth living in settlements and camps that were out of school. In addition, MST activists were motivated to engage in this struggle due to the contrast between the movement's vision for the countryside—of vibrant, intellectual communities of small farmers and collective agricultural production—and the traditional vision teachers held of education as a path for youth to leave “backwards” rural areas. MST leaders wanted to form new activists from among the youth populations, not witness a mass rural-urban migration. Illiteracy was also rampant in agrarian reform communities, leading MST activists to organize several large-scale literacy campaigns in the early 1990s.

The MST's investment in educational access in the countryside stood in stark contrast to the Brazilian government's historical disregard for rural schooling. Even in the 1990s, the rural public school system in Brazil was in a dire state. During the two decades of military dictatorship there had been heavy investments in secondary and tertiary education, levels of schooling that were seen as critical for Brazil's economic development and urban industrialization. Primary education—which constituted the majority of schooling in rural areas—was largely ignored (Plank, 1996, pp. 174–175). The constitution of 1988 brought important structural reforms to the public school system, such as the devolution of schooling to states and municipalities, however, educational improvement was difficult due to the impoverished condition of local governments now charged with providing educational access to all citizens. Consequently, throughout the 1990s rural education did not significantly improve (Plank, 1996). These schools were seen as an embarrassment to a “modern” Brazilian state: a system that still contained multi-grade classrooms, teachers with no higher education, and collapsing infrastructure.<sup>117</sup>

At the same time, in the early 1990s, international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank were becoming dominant voices in global educational debates (Klees et al., 2012; Samoff, 1999). These organizations primarily focused on eradicating illiteracy and

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<sup>116</sup> The lack of support for agrarian reform under President Lula's government is well documented. Branford (2009) writes extensively about this relationship, describing how Lula went back on many of his initial promises to implement wide-scale agrarian reform. Although there was an increase in credits to agrarian reform settlements during his two mandates, the amount of land expropriate or bought and redistributed was much less than the Cardoso government (p. 423). Furthermore, Lula supported many initiatives that expanded industrial agriculture, including the ethanol production (Branford, 2009, p. 431).

<sup>117</sup> It was only in 1998 that there was a reform in financing, and the federal government began to guarantee a minimum level of spending per student for primary schools. This program was known as FUNDEF (Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Elementary Education and Valorization of Elementary School Teachers) until 2007, when it was expanded to include secondary education and named FUNDEB.

providing universal access to primary education in high-poverty countries. International program coordinators often criticized the priorities of national governments and tried to circumvent corrupt and “inefficient” bureaucracies by working directly with local communities. This was part of a larger neo-liberal perspective becoming dominant in development discourse, which promoted the devolution of school authority to local governing levels that were considered more efficient and accountable to communities (Bray, 2003). In this context, UNESCO and UNICEF began directly to fund the MST’s educational initiatives. These international organizations invested in the MST, despite the movement’s political and socialist goals, simply because the activists—in the absence of the state—had organized the most massive educational programs in the countryside.

The head of the educational unit of UNESCO-Brazil in 2014, Maria Rebeca Gomes, explains the funding relationship that the agency developed with the MST during this period: ‘The MST was the only group working in the settlements . . . it is hard to work in these areas if you are not connected to the MST, these are very poor areas. The MST created the infrastructure for these programs, and the families living in the settlements already had a relationship with the MST.’<sup>118</sup> As this official suggests, the imperative for expanding educational access in high poverty areas overshadowed ideological differences between the program coordinators and the movement. Given the MST’s organizational networks in these communities, it made sense to ask for the movement help in the agency’s literacy campaign. Similarly, in 1996, the University of Brasília convinced the Ministry of Education to sign a contract that would allow the MST train 7,000 literacy agents to attend to agrarian reform areas (Carter & Carvalho, 2009, p. 309). In 1995, the MST received a prize in “Education and Participation” from UNICEF for the teacher certification courses activists had developed for rural teachers. The fact that an internationally respected organization would give such a prestigious educational award to a confrontational movement was significant, giving the MST a public legitimacy that President Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s government (Brazilian Democratic Socialist Party, PSDB) tried to deny.

How do we conceptualize this convergence between the interests of international organizations subverting national governments and a grassroots socialist movements? From a Gramscian perspective these articulations are neither examples of complete co-optation nor unconstrained resistance. Rather, we may understand this development in the following ways: a decade of resistance to neoliberal projects put the legitimacy of the state in question, forcing it to adapt in order to maintain its hegemonic role in society. This resulted in a “revisionist” form of neoliberalism, in which issues of “participation,” “civil society,” and “empowerment” were now central (Hart, 2001, p. 655). Mohan and Stokke (2000) refer to this development as the new right and the new left’s “convergence on the ‘local’” (p. 247). In this context, anti-capitalist Marxist movements such as the MST *took advantage* of this new focus on the “local” and the desire among development actors to make “civil society” a site of intervention. Activists *used* this opportunity to empower collectives, rather than individuals, and struggle for educational practices that could support socialist relations of production. International program coordinators and state actors decided to cooperate with local anti-capitalist groups, rather than exclude them, precisely because of their new dedication to local civil society participation. Thus, socialist mobilization and neoliberal hegemonic politics became linked together in complex ways.

By the mid-1990s, the movement’s educational initiatives were ripe for expansion. First, the MST had developed concrete practices that could be constructed as a comprehensive approach to

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Maria Rebeca Otera Gomes, 24 February 2014 (via Skype).

rural schooling. Second, international organizations recognized these educational practices as legitimate through funding and awards. Third, the MST had cultivated dozens of partnerships with university professors across Brazil, who actively promoted and sponsored MST-literacy programs. The chancellor of the University of Brasília said that the MST had “done more for rural education than government programmes in the previous 500 years” (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 119). Fourth and finally, the federal government faced increasing pressure to provide a solution to the country’s dismal rural education system. This political conjuncture set the stage for a surge in federal support for the movement’s educational initiatives.

### ***Contestation and Political Opening: Education ‘free rides’ to the capital***

The end of the 20th century brought both violent conflict and some of the largest social mobilizations of the MST’s history. On 9 August 1995 military police killed 11 landless people who occupied a rural property in the poor northwestern state of Rondônia. Less than a year later, on 17 April 1996, 19 MST activists were killed by military police in a march in the northern state of Pará. Perversely, this massacre created a political opportunity as there was a general public dismay at these government actions that increased national sympathy for the MST and the agrarian reform struggle (Ondetti, 2008). In commemoration of this latter massacre, in April of 1997, the MST organized a National March on Brasília for Agrarian Reform, with 100,000 people participating. This march succeeded in pressuring President Cardoso to make many concessions to the movement, including land reform. By the end of Cardoso’s first term, 260,000 families had received access to 8 million hectares of land—almost double the amount given in the previous ten years (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 199).

It was within the context of this new political opening—caused by these previous social mobilizations—that MST educational activists began to push the movement’s education proposal into the national debate. According to MST activist Edgar Kolling, the movement’s educational proposal gained national recognition because of its ‘*carona*’ (slang for ‘free ride’) with the larger movement for agrarian reform.<sup>119</sup> In July of 1997, a few months after the national march, MST educational activists organized a National Meeting of Educators in Areas of Agrarian Reform (ENERA). This meeting was encouraged and financed by UNICEF and UNESCO, in recognition of the MST’s educational initiatives. The original plan was for 400 people to attend the first ENERA meeting, but in the end over 700 people participated (Caldart et al., 2012, p. 503). Out of these discussions came a proposal for a federal program that would provide educational access specifically for the children, youth and adults living in camps and settlements, known as the National Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA).<sup>120</sup> Gaventa and McGee’s (2010, p. 15) argue that ‘while political opportunities create possibilities for collective action for policy change, these openings themselves may have been created by prior mobilization.’ The fact that the MST’s educational proposal was able to ‘free ride’ on the movement’s larger mobilization for agrarian reform supports this assessment.

### ***Framing and Coalition Building***

Up until this point all of the MST’s educational initiatives, including PRONERA, were directed towards populations in ‘areas of agrarian reform.’ However, during the ENERA meeting in 1997 representatives from UNICEF and UNESCO encouraged MST activists to expand their

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<sup>119</sup> Interview, Edgar Kolling, 18 November 2010.

<sup>120</sup> PRONERA was put in the Ministry of Agriculture Development, and has had a very different institutional trajectory than the programs in the Ministry of Education.

educational initiatives to include other populations, such as indigenous groups, black communities, and rural workers. The MST activists perceived this as a strategic opportunity to receive more financial support for their educational initiatives. They began referring to their educational proposal as *Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside).

The MST's new use of the phrase *Educação do Campo* in the late 1990s—and the quick disappearance of the term 'education in areas of agrarian reform' from the movement's public discourse—was a top-down and conscious process of framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). The MST's choice of frame resonated with dozens of rural movements, NGOs, and individuals who were not connected to the agrarian reform struggle. For example, a year after the first ENERA meeting in 1997, the MST hosted the first National Conference for a Basic Education of the Countryside. Participants at this conference included 19 federal and state universities, several government agencies, and a dozen other rural social movements and grassroots NGOs.<sup>121</sup>

The 'education of the countryside' frame was also strategic because the federal government was beginning to acknowledge the extreme inequality between public schools, especially between rural and urban areas. In 1998, there was a reform in the financing of primary education, and the federal government began to guarantee a minimum level of spending per student through the National Education Fund (FUNDEF). This provided a surge in financial support for schools that could not reach this minimum (Schwartzman, 2004), and increased attention on the issue of rural public education. The MST's strategy to 'frame issues carefully, adjust to changing circumstances and audiences, and draw upon a wide repertoire of strategies' (Gaventa & McGee, 2010, p. 29), succeeded in bringing dozens of new actors into its educational coalition.

### ***Unstable Alliances: Reconciling Labor-Peasant Tensions***

Despite these advances, there was one group conspicuously absent from the National Conference for a Basic Education of the Countryside, which was preventing the coalition's ability to move forward: Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG). This union confederation, founded in 1963, is made up of dozens of rural federations that consist of thousands of unions representing more than 15 million rural workers.<sup>122</sup> The absence of an organization representing millions of rural workers meant that convincing the federal government to support an educational policy for the entire countryside would be unlikely.

In order to understand CONTAG's absence from this national conference in 1998—and its decision to join the coalition for *Educação do Campo* several years later—it is necessary to trace the history of rural activism back to the years prior to the 1964 coup. During these two decades, Communist Party members and left-leaning Catholic activists were organizing rural workers through the formation of peasant leagues and rural associations. These two groups were often in competition for the allegiance of rural workers, as the Communist Party took a 'quasi-revolutionary approach' and the Catholic organizers 'a moderate, but persistent and firm, demand for the extension of already codified urban workers' rights to their rural counterparts' (Maybury-Lewis, 1994, p. 68). With the passage of the Rural Labor Statute in 1963, CONTAG was founded and, to the dismay of rural elites, communist activists were able to elect themselves

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<sup>121</sup> All of these organizations and institutions are listed in the final conference document.

<sup>122</sup> Maybury-Lewis (1994, p. 56) groups rural workers historically connected to CONTAG into three groups: small holders and sharecroppers (people with modest access to land they use to plant subsistence and cash crops); salaried workers (with no autonomous control over land); and *posseiros* (homesteaders or squatters).



to the leadership of the confederation (Houtzager, 1998). This situation was short-lived, however, as the military coup took place on 31 March 1964.

Under the military dictatorship, all of CONTAG's elected officers were considered subversives, and 6 out of the 29 state union federations were declared "phantom" and erased from the labor ministry (Welch, 2006). Unexpectedly, the military government did not completely outlaw CONTAG, as they did to the majority of left-wing organizations. Rather, over the next decade the military government purposely stimulated the growth of the rural union movement in an attempt to increase agricultural production, foster national integration, and incorporate rural labor into national society (Houtzager, 1998). Rural oligarchs still ruled the countryside, and the military government wanted to curb their power by having a presence in remote regions. Turning the union movement into the distributional arm of the state could achieve this goal. CONTAG experienced its biggest growth during this period, with the number of agricultural unions going from 266 in 1963, to 2,144 in 1980 (A. Pereira, 1997, p. 58).

Especially important was the Program for Assistance for the Rural Worker (PRORUAL), which was established in 1971 to provide medical and dental services for rural populations. CONTAG experienced its biggest growth during this period, from less than three hundred unions in 1963 to over two thousand in the 1980s. Almost all of these rural unions had partnerships with FUNRUAL, illustrating CONTAG's 'huge role in dispensing, organizing and managing the regime's rural medical and dental services, in accord with the military government's plan' (Maybury-Lewis, 1994, p. 41). For many MST activists, this history shows that CONTAG was simply a *pelego* (co-opted) union, functioning as an appendage of the military government.

However, this is not the whole story. While most rural unions functioned as social service providers, some unionists took advantage of the limited space they had to wage a national campaign for workers' rights. These were primarily the activists who had been organizing closely with the Catholic Church prior to the coup. In contrast to the communist party activists, who had largely been purged from their unions, these unionists 'understood that excessive provocation of rural elites and the authorities, given the power relations in the countryside, would hurt them and set back their organization drive . . . They learned the value of respecting the law. Indeed, the unionists became champions of the law, pushing for enforcement of legislation on the books ostensibly to protect their rights' (Maybury-Lewis 1994, p. 73).

In 1968, a group of unionists that came out of this organizing tradition took control of CONTAG. Under this new leadership, CONTAG became a progressive force in the countryside winning concrete legal gains for workers during a highly repressive period. Although most local unions continued to follow a service-oriented path, CONTAG activists helped to develop the leadership of many progressive unionists during this period (Maybury-Lewis, 1994). Although their ability to act was constrained, their presence resulted in important benefits for rural workers: "Precluded from mobilizing rank and file and engaging in any form of collective action, CONTAG undertook instead a 'campaign for rights' in which unions would educate workers about their legal rights and encourage them to bring individual cases before the labor courts" (Houtzager, 1998, p. 132). This legal strategy resulted in real, concrete gains for workers during a highly repressive period. Furthermore, this legalistic approach was the only way rural activists were able to survive during the dictatorship (Welch, 2006, p. 45). The downside of this strategy is that an entire generation of labor activists was not trained to engage in mass mobilization and was accustomed to non-confrontational approaches to unionism, such as letter-writing or educational campaigns. In addition, while ideologically committed activists had taken control of

CONTAG, almost two-thirds of local unions' leadership was still involved in direct service delivery (Houtzager, 1998).

In 1979, in the context of a more general political opening, CONTAG initiated a series of annual strikes in Pernambuco and began calling for large-scale agrarian reform (Maybury-Lewis, 1994, p. 76; Welch, 2009). By this time, other rural organizations were also beginning to engage in direct action in the countryside, such as the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), founded in 1975. The CPT was critical in helping workers occupy land in the early 1980s, the first actions of the soon-to-be MST. These rural activists joined with other urban movements, neighborhood associations, and militant unionists to found the Workers Party (PT) in 1979 and the Central Union of Workers (CUT) in 1983. In contrast, the CONTAG leadership 'made a virtual religion out of its autonomy from political parties' (Houtzager 1998, 135).

The relationship that developed between CONTAG leaders and the emerging landless movement is complex. Many unionists developed strong connections to the CPT, the MST, and the PT, and with the help of these social movements they took over their local unions (Maybury-Lewis, 1994, pp. 173–197). In Pernambuco, in the early 1990s, local union activists actually hosted MST activists in their headquarters and helped the movement organize its first land occupations in the sugar cane region. This eventually led to the state union federation in Pernambuco leading its own land occupations in the mid-1990s—despite a deeply embedded culture of 'following the law' (Rosa, 2009, pp. 471–472).

At the national level, however, there were serious ideological divides between CONTAG and the CUT, CPT, and MST leaders. First and foremost, CUT believed 'that a rapid separation of the union movement from the money, flows, job sinecures, and state policy orientation' was necessary, while CONTAG 'felt that this would create tremendous organizational difficulties, given the extreme poverty of the workers they were representing' (Maybury-Lewis 1994, 242). In many local unions a competitive relationship developed between CONTAG and CUT, as CUT activists—often in tandem with the MST and the CPT—ran their own candidates in local union elections. This fed into a general mistrust between the national MST leadership and CONTAG, in addition to other ideological disputes.

A critical moment occurred in 1995, at CONTAG's VI National Congress, when CUT activists won enough local elections that they tipped CONTAG's internal power balance, leading CONTAG to affiliate with CUT. At this congress delegates also began to discuss a proposal for broader social policies in the countryside, which became known as the Alternative Project for Sustainable Rural Development and Solidarity (PADRSS).<sup>123</sup> The PADRSS proposal represented a new focus within the confederation on broader public policies in the countryside. The plan emphasized several elements including agrarian reform, family agriculture, environmental conservation, food sovereignty, biodiversity, territorial sovereignty, women's rights, racial and ethnic equality, and the promotion of social policies. CONTAG activists were also discussing sustainable development, agrarian reform, and agroecology—issues much more closely aligned with the political goals of the MST.

A leader in the CONTAG federation in Pernambuco explained how these developments related to education: 'In 1995 there was a national congress of the rural workers, and we discussed the alternative project we were trying to construct for society . . . we wrote the PADRSS proposal . . . it was a document that discussed the public policies we wanted for the

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<sup>123</sup> Initially, this proposal was the Alternative Project for Sustainable Rural Development (PADRS).

countryside, and education entered there.<sup>124</sup> The first two coordinators of *Educação do Campo* within CONTAG also write that PADRSS solidified the importance of public education within the rural workers' movement (Costa Lunas & Novaes Rocha, n.d.). At CONTAG's 7<sup>th</sup> National Congress, in 1998, the delegates passed the PADRSS proposal. The combination of this new PADRSS proposal, and the attention rural public education was receiving nationally, led the leadership of CONTAG to take a stance on the issue of formal education. Activists began to understand public schooling—not just popular education—as critical to stimulating the other goals of the rural workers movement. By 2001, CONTAG was at the forefront of the national coalition for *Educação do Campo*.<sup>125</sup>

### ***A Legalistic Turn***

The new use of the phrase *Educação do Campo*—and the quick disappearance of the term “pedagogy of the MST” from the movement's public discourse—was a top-down and conscious process of framing. In the social movement literature, frames refer to “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meaning that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). Frames are how social movement participants make sense of their struggle. Frame alignment refers to a process whereby actors consciously create new forms of collective interpretation—the frame—in order to align with interests, values, goals and beliefs of other individuals and groups (Snow et al., 1986). The capacity for these collective interpretations to align with the values and beliefs of others is called resonance. The amount of resonance a frame has is the frame's ability to “make sense,” connect with, or be accepted by another individual or group. The MST's choice to frame the movement's educational proposal as *Educação do Campo*, not the “pedagogy of the MST” or “education for areas of agrarian reform” resonated with dozens of more rural movements, NGOs, and individuals who were not connected to the agrarian reform struggle. As many scholars have illustrated (Benford & Snow, 2000; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996b; McCammon, Muse, Newman, & Terrell, 2007; Paschel, 2010; Snow et al., 1986), this process of frame alignment helps in expanding a movement's network of allies.

However, less often emphasized in this literature are the other implications of the framing process. In the case of the MST, as more civil society organizations began internalizing the struggle for *Educação do Campo*, the MST became only one of the many groups laying claim to the meaning of these educational ideas. Subsequently, these new interactions between social movements with distinct histories and relationships towards the state transformed the MST's original goals. This is similar to Steinberg's (1999) argument that the framing literature should have a more dialogical focus that acknowledges discourse and language as an ongoing process of social communication (p. 743). CONTAG activists did not take on the struggle for *Educação do Campo* simply because MST activists shifted their frame; there were also internal changes occurring within CONTAG itself, which were part of a larger shift in the dominant discourses about rural injustice in the late 1990s. This facilitated CONTAG's decision to make *Educação do Campo* one of the new political goals of the organization.

Consequently, between the first national conference for *Educação do Campo* in 1998 and the second national conference in 2005, CONTAG became one of the most important participants in the national struggle for *Educação do Campo*—at times surpassing the role of the MST itself.

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Sonia Santos, 2 March 2011.

<sup>125</sup> The first two coordinators of the *Educação do Campo* within CONTAG also confirm that the PADRSS proposal solidified the importance of public education (Costa Lunas and Novaes Rocha n.d.).

The alliance that formed between these two movements was not inevitable. It occurred at a particular historical moment when a series of internal changes within CONTAG opened up the possibility for the confederation to take a position on the issue of public education. Although CONTAG had decades of experience developing innovative educational programs for rural workers during the dictatorship, often based in the pedagogies of Paulo Freire (Houtzager, 1998), the confederation had never been involved in debates about public schooling.<sup>126</sup>

The MST's decision to frame the movement's educational approach for a broader rural population had direct implications for the trajectory of this educational struggle. Despite the changes that occurred within CONTAG between 1995 and 1998, decades of practice with a legalistic approach to workers' rights was still engrained within the organization. As soon as CONTAG activists decided to take on the issue of *Educação do Campo*, their first step was to work with President Cardoso's government to pass through a law in support of this educational approach. The MST, whose historical relationship with the government and especially the PSDB was much more confrontational, did not directly participate in this process. However, after this legalistic strategy was successful, the MST began engaging with the institutional realm. These interactions illustrate the ways that movements, with different histories, transform each other through their interactions. The MST's engagement with public education pushed CONTAG—already going through a series of changes—to take a position on public education. CONTAG activists—who still approached workers' rights through legal interventions—applied this approach to *Educação do Campo*. CONTAG's legalistic strategy succeeded in convincing the National Education Advisory Board<sup>127</sup> to approve a resolution supporting the “Operational Guidelines for a Basic Education in the Schools of the Countryside” on April 3, 2002.

Once this new federal law about rural education was passed, both the MST and CONTAG declared it a victory and began using the resolution's language to make other educational demands on federal, state and municipal governments. However, it was clearly CONTAG who pushed this legal struggle between 2000 and 2001. MST activists were at best ambivalent to the process. Edla Soarez, a representative from the National Education Advisory Board and sponsor of the federal law went all over the country getting feedback from different rural groups about their educational experiences. Edla made it a point to contact MST activists in each state, but she recalls MST activists did not often show up. She suspects<sup>128</sup> that the MST did not participate because activists were still more concerned with defending their own schools. According<sup>129</sup> to José Wilson, a CONTAG activist, the MST did not participate in this process because the movement did not have the political connections necessary to push through a federal law. CONTAG had these connections, and was able to take a lead in this legal struggle. Rosali Caldart, a national MST educational activist, confirms this assertion: “We participated very little in writing the guidelines, the union movement was closer . . . This is not because we decided not to participate, but because this was not our world” (Marcos de Anhaia, 2010). The first two decades of the MST's struggle were based on a confrontational relationship with the federal government; MST activists were not yet comfortable in the “world” of politicking. If CONTAG had not intervened in this struggle, the MST might have never pushed for a federal law

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<sup>126</sup> This fact is confirmed by CONTAG's own internal analysis. For example, a short article written by two of the coordinators of *Educação do Campo* within CONTAG states that until the 1990s, the rural workers movement was only concerned with popular education (Costa Lunas & Novaes Rocha, n.d.)

<sup>127</sup> *Conselho Nacional da Educação/ Câmara da Educação Básica* (CNE/CEB)

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Edla Soarez, April 6, 2011.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with José Wilson de Souza Gonçalves, November 18, 2011.

supporting their educational initiatives. Consequently, despite the historic role the MST played in popularizing *Educação do Campo*, populations living in areas of agrarian reform—known as “*assentados* (settlers) and *acampados* (camped people)—were not mentioned as one of the constituencies in this educational law.<sup>130</sup>

Between 1997 and 2001, the MST’s educational practices transformed from a series of isolated initiatives taking place in agrarian reform communities, to a general approach for rural education known nationally as *Educação do Campo* and supported by federal law. There were five major factors that made this success possible. First, there was the influence and financial resources of UNESCO, UNICEF, and university professors who supported the movement’s educational initiatives. Second, the state-sponsored violence against the MST in the mid-1990s meant that support for the movement and agrarian reform was at a peak, increasing the MST’s ability to disrupt public life, and resulting in President Cardoso’s direct concessions to the movement. This included a series of educational concessions. Third, this success at the federal level, the pressure from their international supporters, and the MST’s internal strategy discussions led the movement to re-frame its educational struggle for a larger rural population. This shift is evident between 1997 and 1998, as MST activists changed the name of their national meetings from, the “National Meeting for Educators of Agrarian Reform” in 1997, to a “National Conference for a Basic Education of the Countryside” in 1998. Fourth, this re-framing of the MST’s educational proposal occurred in parallel to deep political shifts within CONTAG, which led to the confederation’s incorporation of *Educação do Campo*. Finally, CONTAG’s legalistic approach to workers’ rights made passing a federal law supporting *Educação do Campo* a priority for the confederation, and union activists’ connections within the government made this legalistic battle possible, even under an antagonistic government.

### ***Educação do Campo* Meets the Iron Cage**

In this section I analyze the process of institutionalizing *Educação do Campo* in the Ministry of Education (MEC) between 2003 and 2012, under the PT government. I assess how the new political context under which this institutionalization took place—a left-wing government nominally supportive of civil society participation—blurred the line between activist and bureaucrat, and transformed the relationships between rural social movements and MEC bureaucrats. However, I also argue that despite these new relationships and the PT government’s nominal support of including social movement voices, there were particular characteristics of the MEC’s organizational structure and institutional culture that subverted activists’ intentions.

After the “Operational Guidelines for *Educação do Campo*” were passed in April of 2002, President Cardoso’s government took no further actions to institutionalize these ideas. The rural social movements also stopped advocating for any further actions to be taken in respect to this educational proposal. It was an election year and social movements across the country, including the MST, were focused on bringing the PT to power.<sup>131</sup> Consequently, when President Lula came to office in 2003 he had a long list of promises to fulfill for the activists that had mobilized his support. One of those demands was to transform *Educação do Campo* into a concrete set of programs within the Ministry of Education.

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<sup>130</sup> This only changed when a newer version of the resolution passed in 2008.

<sup>131</sup> Although the MST did not formally endorse Lula for president, thousands of activists campaigned on his behalf during the 2002 election (Branford, 2009, p. 417).

In 2004, President Lula implemented a series of internal changes in the MEC to address these demands. Most significantly, the President created a Secretary for Continual Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD), which included a Department of Education for Diversity and Citizenship. Within this department there would be a specific office for *Educação do Campo*. Furthermore, a “Permanent Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo*”<sup>132</sup> was established, which could advise bureaucrats on the process of implementing the federal *Educação do Campo* guidelines (MEC, 2004). The Advisory Board included representatives from all of the principal social movements, NGOs, and university partners that pushed for *Educação do Campo* over the previous five years. This advisory board worked directly with MEC officials to do this work. Thus, the typical relationship between social movements and the state appeared to have transformed, as CONTAG, the MST, and their allies were given an institutional space to engage with state actors. However, maintaining the contentious alliance between CONTAG and the MST—the two most important groups in this Advisory Board—was critical for MEC bureaucrats to move forward in this institutional process.

As soon as the federal government created an *Educação do Campo* office in the Ministry of Education, the historical tensions between the MST and CONTAG emerged. Both of these organizations demanded that the coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office come out of their own ranks. Under these circumstances, Professor Antonio Munarim—an academic not overtly associated with either movement—became the first coordinator of MEC’s *Educação do Campo* office. As Munarim tells<sup>133</sup> the story, his name was suggested, precisely because he was not considered a “member” of any one movement. In fact, Munarim had not played any significant role in the national movement for *Educação do Campo* in the late 1990s, precisely because he was finishing his doctoral dissertation research. According to Munarim, the timing of his doctoral research was the major reason he was selected for the position—he had not been active enough for either movement to form an opinion about him! In July of 2004 the Secretary of SECAD (the Secretary housing the *Educação do Campo* office), Ricardo Henrique, asked him to go to Brasília and attend the II National Conference for *Educação do Campo*, where he would be announced as the coordinator. Munarim laughed as he told the story: “Ricardo threw me into the scene to see if anyone would object, and if no one did, I would be picked.”

Unlike the I National Conference for *Educação do Campo* in 1998, which the MST and a few allies organized, the II National Conference in 2004 had over 38 groups that were the official sponsors of the event.<sup>134</sup> The civil society and government actors that participated in the II National Conference for *Educação do Campo* included social movements, universities, NGOs, congressional groups, municipal and state representatives, federal government actors, and church organizations. The increase in participants was a result of the consolidation of the national

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<sup>132</sup> This advisory board was first called the *Grupo de Trabalho Permanente da Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside Permanent Working Group) in 2003, and became the *Coordenação Nacional para Educação do Campo* (National Coordination for Education of the Countryside) in 2004. I refer to both groups as the Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo*, to reduce the amount of names.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Antonio Munarim, November 28, 2011.

<sup>134</sup> On the final conference document produced at the first national conference in 1998, there are five conference organizers mentioned: the CNBB, the MST, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the University of Brasília. In the second conference document, thirty-eight groups are mentioned, including the five above as well as: CONTAG, UNEFAB, UNDIME, MPA, MAP, MMC, MDA/INCRA/PRONERA, MEC, FEAB, CNTE, SINASEFE, ANDES, Comissão de Educação e Cultural de Camara dos Deputados, Frente Parlamentar das CEFFA’s, SEAP/PR, MTE, MMA, MinC, AGB, CONSED, FETRAF, CPT, CIMI, MEB, PJR, Cáritas, CERIS, MOC, RESAB, SERTA, IRPAA Caatinga, ARCAFAR SUL/Norte.

movement for *Educação do Campo* over the previous six years, the inclusion of CONTAG—an organization perceived as more mainstream—in the coalition, the passing of a federal law to support these educational initiatives, and the election of the PT government. This latter factor was especially significant. Together CONTAG and the MST made up the majority of President Lula’s rural base of support. Although President Lula did not fulfill his promise to implement large-scale agrarian reform (Branford, 2009), his government did increase other resources to these constituencies, including agricultural credits, housing subsidies, and new educational programs. A diverse array of civil society groups wanted access to these new resources.

Despite the plurality of voices present in the second conference, the MST and CONTAG continued to drive this process in a tenuous and contentious partnership. For example, when Professor Munarim arrived at the conference, he immediately ran into Rosali Caldart, a national activist in the MST Education Sector. Rosali exclaimed, “Professor Munarim, what are you doing here?” In response, he told Rosali that he had been tapped as the coordinator of *Educação do Campo*. Laughing, Rosali said that she had better not give him a hug yet, because if CONTAG activists saw him interacting with her, his name would be rejected from the nomination. On August 6, 2004, Munarim became the first coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office, representing an institutional compromise between CONTAG and the MST, mediated by the MEC. While the II National Conference for *Educação do Campo* in 2004 represented the pinnacle of hope for the national *Educação do Campo* movement, frustration with this institutional process quickly followed.

#### ***“A tiny door that opened to a waiting room”: Hierarchy in the Ministry***

Armênio Bello Schmidt became the new director of the Department of Education for Diversity and Citizenship when the department was created in 2004. He recalled the significance of this re-structuring within the MEC: never before had there been an educational department that thought about the diversity of the Brazilian population, such as black communities, indigenous students, and rural populations.<sup>135</sup> Now all of these debates about the need for diversity in the curriculum and in school organization were on the table, and there was an institutional space for civil society to participate, the Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo*.

In contrast to Armênio, Edgar Kolling recalls<sup>136</sup> these institutional changes with anger. The MST had supported the creation of a “Secretary of *Educação do Campo*,” reporting directly to the Minister of Education. Instead, the Minister made *Educação do Campo* an office, within a department, within a secretary. The decision-making power of the coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office would be highly restricted, particularly in a hierarchical institution such as the MEC. Therefore, the institutional space that the MST, CONTAG, and other allies had won for grassroots participation would not be as expansive as the activists had hoped.

Indeed, from the beginning Antonio Munarim faced huge barriers sparking people’s interest about *Educação do Campo* within the Ministry of Education, given the low status of the office he was directing. Even though dozens of MEC officials worked directly with rural education, these other bureaucrats were not concerned about adhering to the new rural education proposal. Munarim’s inability to change the rest of the Ministry led to the increasing isolation of the *Educação do Campo* office. He explains:<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with Armênio Bello Schmidt, November 10, 2010.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Antonio Munarim, November 28, 2011.

We needed an organizational structure that was strong, with professionals that were competent, and this never happened. The contraction of more people never happened . . . In that moment the MEC showed what it really was, a heavy infrastructure. SECAD [Secretary of Continual Education, Literacy and Diversity] was an opening, a tiny door that opened to a waiting room, but it never let anyone into the kitchen.

Professor Munarim refers to the “heavy infrastructure” in the Ministry of Education, or in other words, the hierarchical structures and bureaucratic processes that became barriers for carrying out institutional change. Even though *Educação do Campo* was now part of Brazilian law, the location of the *Educação do Campo* office in a lowly position within MEC’s bureaucratic structure meant that influencing other departments was almost impossible. Professor Munarim calls SECAD—the secretary that houses the *Educação do Campo* office—“a tiny door that opened into a waiting room.”

Professor Munarim says he waited two years for someone with power to enter the waiting room and hear the demands of the social movements participating in the Advisory Board. No one ever showed up. Professor Munarim eventually gave up and wrote a letter denouncing the Ministry of Education’s structure. The letter states:<sup>138</sup>

The creation of the Coordinating Committee for *Educação do Campo* signaled a strong commitment within the Ministry of Education for these proposals, and opened up the possibility of inviting civil society groups into these discussions . . . The opposite has happened. Representatives from rural social movements have been the only effective presence in these meetings . . . My impression is that the creation of the office for *Educação do Campo*, which at first seemed to be an advance, has ended up producing two undesirable consequences: first, the Advisory Board lost its role as an effective force within the MEC; and second, the national movement for *Educação do Campo* . . . demobilized.

In his letter, Professor Munarim expresses frustration with the weak relationship between the Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo*—where civil society was participating—and the MEC bureaucrats. This Advisory Board had been an attempt to transform the traditional relationship between the state and civil society, allowing civil society to “cross the great divide” (Ostrom, 1996) and participate in the public sphere. However, as Munarim writes, the social movements participated in this space without the participation of MEC officials that had power to implement their demands. In a hierarchical and bureaucratic institution like the MEC, shifting these state-society relations proved difficult, especially given the traditional monopoly MEC officials have had over educational expertise; activists’ similar claim to educational knowledge threatened these bureaucrats. In the middle of August of 2006, only two years after Professor Munarim was appointed coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office—as an explicit MST-CONTAG compromise—he was fired. Professor Munarim had attempted to bypass his immediate superior, Armênio Schmidt, and communicate his concerns to the Secretary of SECAD. Bypassing the MEC’s internal hierarchy and critiquing the MEC’s priorities was not permitted.

It was only after Professor Munarim left the MEC that some of the programs the Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo* promoted began to be operationalized and implemented. This was a top-down decision from the Minister of Education, in response to the

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<sup>138</sup> Antonio Munarim gave me a copy of the original letter he was going to send, and the shorter version he ended up sending to the Secretary of SECAD. The following quotes are from this later version.



protests of social movement activists after Munarim's firing. The MEC officials implemented three programs on a mass scale. One was a bachelor-level teacher certification program that prepared people to teach high school in rural areas, known as LEDOC (Bachelor Degree in *Educação do Campo*). A second initiative was the *Escola Ativa* (Active School), a World Bank program implemented in partnership with municipal and state governments to improve the quality of education in multi-grade classrooms. A third program the MEC funded was an adult education program that allowed people in rural communities to complete fifth through eighth grades, known as *Saberes da Terra* (Knowledge of the Lands). The following sections analyze the implementation and the expansion of the first two of these programs.

### ***“Losing everything it was supposed to be”: The Pitfalls of Rapid Expansion***

The MST had a large role in the development and implementation of the first “pilot course” for the LEDOC university-degree program. The goal of the LEDOC program is to prepare teachers to work in countryside through access to higher education and training in the philosophy of *Educação do Campo*. The MEC officials allowed the MST to help develop the LEDOC proposal, due to the movement's previous experiences overseeing university degree programs in pedagogy through the federal program PRONERA (see Chapter 4). The first LEDOC program was launched as an experimental “pilot” course, administered through an open partnership between the Ministry of Education, the University of Brasília, and the MST. The course took place in one of the MST's private “movement” schools, known as the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC).<sup>139</sup> The MST originally founded this school in 1995 in order to offer alternative high school courses to activists living in settlements and camps. The fact that the first LEDOC course took place in one of the movement's own spaces—where MST activists had been implementing their pedagogical practices for over a decade—meant the course adhered closely to the MST's pedagogical approach. The MST activists were daily participants, administrators, and directors of the LEDOC program, even publishing a series of reflections on this first experience (Caldart, Fetzner, Rodrigues, & Fretias, 2010). Although MEC officials and University of Brasília faculty were present in the administration of this pilot course, the MST was the dominant force in the process.

The first LEDOC program overcame the traditional relationship between MEC bureaucrats and social movement activists. The MST not only participated in proposing this program and deliberating about its content, but also engaged in the administration and daily oversight of the program once implemented. This process is similar to what Abers and Keck (2009) have called civil society “throughput.” MST activists incorporated pedagogies into the program that had been developed by the movement over the previous decade: for example, the organization of school tasks through student collectives; an emphasis on both manual and intellectual labor; a focus on agro-ecological training; beginning and ending each school day with rural cultural performances. The MST's prior experiences and educational expertise increased the MEC's institutional capacity to develop this program. This illustrates that civil society may become important not only in processes of deliberation, but also in helping to mobilize the state's own capacity to provide public goods (Abers & Keck, 2009; Hochstetler &

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<sup>139</sup> This school is more popularly known by the name of the educational entity that hosts the school, ITERRA (Technical Institute of Training and Research for Agrarian Reform), and is located in the city of Veranópolis in Rio Grande do Sul. See Tarlau (2012) for more details on IEJC, and the implementation of Soviet, Freirean, and MST practices in these schools.

Keck, 2007). This was not simply civil society replacing the state, but activists working with state actors throughout the entire implementation process.

Even before the first year of the four-year pilot program was over, MEC bureaucrats helped the University of Brasília launch a second program, this time located on the University's campus. These bureaucrats encouraged professors to permanently institutionalize the LEDOC proposal into the university's internal structure, so the MEC would no longer oversee future programs. By the end of 2007, the Ministry launched LEDOC in three more universities.<sup>140</sup> Four years later, in 2011, there were thirty-two universities that had LEDOC degree programs within their institutional structure<sup>141</sup>—with assigned staff, tenured professors, official curriculum, and an annual application process. The MEC officials were thinking about quantity: they wanted to reach the largest number of rural students possible. With this rapid expansion MST activists lost their ability to participate and many of the educational pedagogies that they had initially developed for the program were either diluted or discarded.

The MST's perspective on these university degree programs is mixed. On the positive side, activists acknowledged that the mere existence of the LEDOC program is a huge advance over traditional bachelor degrees programs in pedagogy, which are urban-centric. Furthermore, the LEDOC courses are a form of affirmative action, specifically targeting populations living in the countryside. On the negative side, MST activists feel the movement has lost its ability to participate actively in the implementation of these courses. Rosali Caldart, one of the major contributors to the pilot course, says<sup>142</sup> “the LEDOC proposal represents the MST's concern with all schools in rural areas, not just MST schools.” However, she continues, the process is more constrained, which is why the MST continues to offer courses beyond the purview of the Ministry of Education's *Educação do Campo* department.

Luiz Antonio Pasquetti (more commonly known as Tônico) is a tenured professor in the University of Brasília LEDOC program. Tônico was also a MST activist for over a decade and has a good understanding of the history and purpose of *Educação do Campo*. He says<sup>143</sup> the LEDOC program draws on many of the MST's educational practices, such as collective childcare, class assemblies, and student collectives that are in charge of overseeing the course. However, he continues, there are limitations to this collective process within a rigid university structure. One constraint Tônico mentions are the individual fellowships that students receive to attend the LEDOC course: although the university sets up collective housing, people do not have put this individual fellowship towards this housing. Vanderlúcia Simplicio, an MST activist overseeing the program, kept repeating,<sup>144</sup> “the proposal is expanding, but it is losing everything it was supposed to be.” When I spoke to Vanderlúcia she was observing the fifth LEDOC degree program offered by the University of Brasília. She says that each year it is harder for the program to adhere to the original proposal. She believes part of the problem is that students may come from the countryside, but many have no previous connection to any social movement. Therefore, students are more resistant to the collective orientation of the course, such as the housing, student collectives, or even shared chores. Vanderlúcia attempts to intervene, and remind students about

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<sup>140</sup> Interview with Monica Molina, November 10, 2010.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Prof. Munarim, November 28, 2011 and Luiz Antonio Pasquetti, November 17, 2011.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Rosali Caldart, January 17, 2010.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Prof. Luiz Antonio Pasquetti, November 17, 2011.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Vanderlúcia Simplicio, November 9, 2010.

the principles of *Educação do Campo*. Nevertheless, it is difficult, and she fears the situation is worse in universities where LEDOC is being implemented and there are no activists present.

Vanderlúcia says that this was never the MST's goal: if the movement had simply wanted more *space* in the universities for rural populations, they would have fought for this *access*. The movement's goal was to offer a radically different form of education that could train critically aware teachers who understand the history of exploitation in the countryside, and are prepared to help students confront these injustices and construct a new socialist society. *Educação do Campo* was never just about access. The LEDOC courses, as currently implemented by the MEC, are far from achieving these broader goals. The case of LEDOC illustrates that even when activists help the development of a pilot program, the scale of implementation the MEC hopes to promote as a large government bureaucracy hinders the movement's ability to participate. This suggests certain limits to what movements can accomplish in the institutional sphere; even a large national movement like the MST might lack the internal capacity to help implement a national educational policy on the scale that the federal government demands.

### ***“Closing down other experiences”: Imposing Best Practices***

The largest program that MEC officials implemented through the *Educação do Campo* office is *Escola Ativa*. This program, designated for first through sixth grade teachers in multi-grade classrooms, quickly began functioning in almost every state in Brazil. Since the MEC does not have direct control over primary schools, *Escola Ativa* functions in coordination with state and municipal governments. The MEC offers local governments funding to organize a series of statewide seminars on the pedagogical techniques teachers can utilize in multi-grade classrooms.<sup>145</sup> As of the end of 2011, *Escola Ativa* was the educational program with the largest budget in the Ministry of Education, with over 1.3 million students in this program in 2010.<sup>146</sup>

*Escola Ativa* has had a very different historical trajectory than the LEDOC program. The Brazilian government adapted *Escola Ativa* from an internationally famous education program first implemented in Colombia in the 1970s—*Escuela Nueva*.<sup>147</sup> In May of 1996—a few years before the MST's educational initiatives began to receive national recognition as *Educação do Campo*—the World Bank invited a group of MEC program directors to participate in a course about the *Escuela Nueva* in Colombia. The Brazilian officials were impressed, and decided to implement the program in Brazil, focusing on Northeastern states where multi-grade classrooms were the most prevalent. The bureaucrats renamed the program *Escola Ativa*, and the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE), the financial arm of the MEC, administered the program for almost a decade.<sup>148</sup> In 2007, however, without consulting any of the civil society groups in the Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo*, the Minister of Education decided to relocate *Escola Ativa* into the *Educação do Campo* office.

Activists from both the MST and CONTAG were furious about the imposition of *Escola Ativa* into the office they had mobilized to create. For them, this office was an institutional space

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<sup>145</sup> For example, teachers are advised not to separate students by their grade, but instead, create mixed-grade activities so that students in different grades can teach and learn from each other.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Armênio Bello Schmidt, November 10, 2010.

<sup>147</sup> Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the program expanded in Colombia, supported by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Foundation. According to the *Escuela Nueva* Foundation website, “In 1989 the *Escuela Nueva* model was recognized by the World Bank as being one of the three most successful public policy reforms in developing countries around the world.” The program now exists in 16 different countries, promoted by these international organizations as a global “best practice” in education.

<sup>148</sup> “Escola Ativa: Project Base,” a Ministry of Education publication, 2010.

that grassroots movements had created to implement *their* educational ideas. Although there was still disagreement between these two organizations about the content of *Educação do Campo*, neither the MST nor CONTAG wanted their own educational practices to be replaced by a Colombian program, sponsored by the World Bank. The MST and CONTAG joined together to oppose the program. Despite these protests, the MEC officials continued to insist that the *Escola Ativa* program fit into the goals of the *Educação do Campo* office. The MEC claimed the social movements were ideologically opposed to the program simply because the World Bank was involved. Armênio Schmidt explains:<sup>149</sup> “There were no other proposals that were as good. The social movements could keep their programs, but we also implemented this program.”

The MEC officials who supported *Escola Ativa* could not completely ignore the MST and CONTAG’s united critiques. The officials partially appeased the activists by allowing them to help re-write the program’s curriculum. Schmidt recalls the extensive process of developing 25 new textbooks for *Escola Ativa*. The curriculum was also adapted into several regional versions, which were more sensitive to local realities. The result was a new hybrid curriculum that includes elements of both the Colombia program and the major philosophical underpinnings of *Educação do Campo*. For example, one of the textbooks states: “*Educação do Campo* is a form of social-political action, in opposition to traditional rural education . . . it is education for social transformation” (MEC, 2010, p. 18). The text elaborates on aspects of this social transformation, which include education for work and cooperation, education based in humanistic values, and education as a permanent process of formation and human transformation. “It is in this perspective that the *Escola Ativa* Program was reformulated . . . with the principal goal of overcoming the traditional prejudice vision of rural spaces and their inhabitants” (MEC, 2010, pp. 20–23). As these excerpts illustrate, the activists’ reformulation of *Escola Ativa* significantly altered this program’s original curriculum. Thus, the implementation of *Escola Ativa* represents both a process of imposition—of an external program into an office social movements had created—and a process of state accommodation—which allowed activists to adapt this program to adhere to their original goals. Despite these changes, the MST and CONTAG continue to denounce *Escola Ativa*.<sup>150</sup>

### ***Increasing Levels of Education Protests***

Despite these challenges in the administrative and bureaucratic realm, the social movements in the national coalition for *Educação do Campo* still engaged in Alvarez’s (1990) ‘dual strategy’ and Fox’s (1992) ‘sandwich strategy’ throughout this period: working with MEC officials, while also mobilizing contentious actions to support their educational demands. Figure 4.1 illustrates the rising number of protests concerning education during this period.<sup>151</sup>

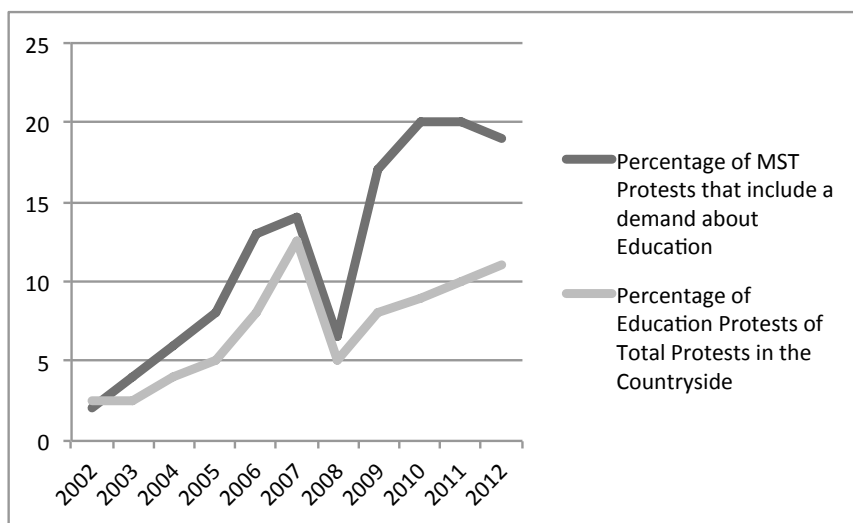
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<sup>149</sup> Interview with Armênio Bello Schmidt, November 10, 2010.

<sup>150</sup> These protests eventually resulted in the termination of *Escola Ativa* in 2012. It was replaced with a program called ‘Escolas da Terra.’ (Interview with Edson Marcos Anhaia, 7 February 2014).

<sup>151</sup> I created Figure 4.1 by using the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) database on rural mobilizations <<http://www.cptnacional.org.br>>. I went through the databases from 2002 to 2012 and marked all of the protests (MST and other movements) that included a demand about education. I started in 2002 because the CPT protest database pre-2002 does not indicate the type of demand.

Figure 4.1: Percentage of Educational Protests of Total Protests in the Countryside ('02-'12)



As Figure 4.1 illustrates, between 2002 and 2012 the number of MST protests concerning education rose significantly, from less than five percent to around twenty percent. The number of total educational protests in the countryside shows a similar trend. This suggests that successful policy reforms actually increased levels of social mobilization around education.<sup>152</sup>

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Eventually, the combination of internal and external pressure by the national coalition for *Educação do Campo* led to a new development: On 4 November 2010, two months before he left office, President Lula signed a Presidential Decree in support of *Educação do Campo*. The decree states: “*Educação do Campo* will be developed by the federal government in collaboration with the states, federal district, and municipalities, in accordance with the guidelines and established by the National Plan for Education and this Decree.”<sup>153</sup> The national movement for *Educação do Campo* considered the presidential decree to be an enormous victory. Even among MST activists, who were initially skeptical of these legalistic approaches, there is a consensus that the Presidential decree means *Educação do Campo* can no longer be reduced to an assemblage of *ad hoc* programs. It is now a general public policy signed into law by the President himself. Immediately following the signing of the decree, President Lula shook the hands of three different people: Fernando Haddad, the head of the Ministry of Education,

<sup>152</sup> These mobilizations were not usually focused entirely on education. For example, only an average of 30 percent of the MST educational protests between 2002 and 2012 were single-issue protests.

<sup>153</sup> DECRETO Nº 7.352. The first ten articles elaborate on the components of *Educação do Campo*, stipulating the public policies that the MEC should promote. The next eight articles are about PRONERA, and the basic aspects of this program. The final article discusses financing, stating that both *Educação do Campo* and PRONERA require a budget sufficient to follow through on the mandates of the decree.

José Wilson, the head of the Social Policies Department in CONTAG, and MST activist Vanderlúcia Simplício. These three people represented the main protagonists in implementing *Educação do Campo* over the previous decade: the MEC, CONTAG, and the MST.

### **Educação do Campo at a Crossroads**

When PT candidate Dilma Rousseff became the president in January of 2011, the supporters of *Educação do Campo* were at a crossroads. On the one hand, there was no turning back; *Educação do Campo* was now the Ministry of Education's official approach to rural education. There were dozens of universities with *Educação do Campo* departments, hundreds of masters and doctoral students conducting research within this new disciplinary concentration, and several massive federal programs attempting to implement *Educação do Campo* in practice. On the other hand, the institutionalization of *Educação do Campo* in the MEC was a far cry from what the MST, CONTAG, and other civil society actors had wanted. Activists were frustrated with the dominance of *Escola Ativa* and the expansion of LEDOC without a concern for quality and movement participation. For many, this educational proposal was no longer linked to a socialist development model for the Brazilian countryside. To the contrary, many of the new social actors supporting *Educação do Campo* were interested in *reinforcing* capitalist modes of production in the Brazilian countryside.

### ***Agribusiness, Agrarian Reform, and the PT***

The current challenges that the campaign for *Educação do Campo* faces cannot be understood without analyzing the overall agrarian context in Brazil, and particularly the rising importance of agribusiness in the 2000s. The 1980s was a period of transition for the Brazilian economy, when the previous golden-age levels of growth began to slow and social mobilizations increased. Agribusiness groups began to realize a need for more coordination, in the face of economic crisis and land conflicts. The Democratic Rural Union (UDR) was created in 1985 to represent a diversity of elite rural interests. Despite the shifting political and economic context, 'the UDR showed that it had strength to make its interests prevail in the face of new development conditions' (Bruno 1997, 63). In 1993, agribusiness sectors founded the Brazilian Association of Agribusiness (ABAG), in order to 'raise the consciousness of the nation about the importance of agribusiness' and to create 'an institution representative of the common interests of all the agents of the agricultural production chain' (Bruno 1997, 36).

It was during Cardoso's second term in office (1999-2002) that the government began to invest heavily in agribusiness sectors, especially in feed grains such as soy (Delgado 2009, 107). In terms of agrarian reform, while Cardoso had expropriated an unprecedented amount of land during his first term—primarily due to the fall out after the massacres of landless workers in 1995 and 1996 (Ondetti 2008)—the administration shifted to supporting market-based agrarian reform approaches. The justification was that 'market mechanisms will provide access to land without confrontations or disputes and therefore reduce social problems and federal expenses at the same time' (Sauer 2006, 182). This form of market-based agrarian reform was supported by the expanding agribusiness sector.

When President Lula took office in 2003, there was a general assumption that he would reverse these policies and implement a program of agrarian reform based on expropriation. Consequently, right before Lula took office thousands of families moved into camps to take advantage of the new agrarian reform program. However, once in office the Lula administration did not take any actions concerning agrarian reform, and social movements had to mobilize to pressure him on this issue. In response, the government recruited Plínio Sampaio, one of the

most prominent agrarian specialists in Brazil and founding member of the PT, to develop a program for agrarian reform. Sampaio created a plan that would settle approximately one million people in one year. However, according to Miguel Rosseto, the head of the Ministry of Agrarian Development, Sampaio's proposal was not realistic, 'given the actual correlation of social, economic, and political forces' (Branford, 2009, p. 423). In other words, rural social movements were fairly weak and agribusinesses were becoming increasingly stronger. Sampaio was fired shortly after presenting his proposal.

Instead of breaking with Cardoso's previous policies, Lula continued many of Cardoso's market-based agrarian reform initiatives while also publically supporting the PT's previous position on agrarian reform. 'In other words, without criminalizing the struggle for land and still counting on the support of the agrarian social movements and unions, the Lula government was able to operate in a type of "accommodation" between constitutional agrarian reform and the loan programs for buying land that were supported by the World Bank' (Pereira and Sauer 2006, 198). Lula also began to incorporate agribusiness allies into his governing coalition during his first term. Consequently, there was a huge expansion of soybean, corn, and sugarcane production, also partially driven by an increased investment by international capital in Brazilian agriculture (Sauer and Leite 2012). By 2005, agriculture represented 42 percent of Brazilian exports, and became the principal source of income for the federal government to pay off external debt (Carter 2009, 68). A comprehensive program of agrarian reform through expropriation never moved forward.

Rural sectors, for their part, continued to follow a two-decade long strategy of elite capture of the congress. As Bruno (1997, 85) argues, 'Although the UDR [Democratic Rural Union] despises the rules of party politics, it recognized the importance of these political-constitutional spaces and bet on the electoral road as a means of increasing its representation.' Between 1995 and 2006, the average representation of landowners in congress was 2,587 times more than the representation of landless workers and small peasants (Carter 2009, 62-63). Delgado (2009, 108) argues that this 'powerful political representation – the Rural Block – is structured in various political parties and has between one fourth and one third of all congressman and senators voting in Congress.' This congressional power has also resulted in a series of judicial attacks against the MST and other rural social movements over the past decade, in the form of Parliamentary Inquiry Commissions (CPIs).<sup>154</sup> These developments are in addition to a general criminalization of rural social movements in the media, and attacks through other judicial bodies such as the Public Ministry and the Federal Court of Audits (TCU).<sup>155</sup>

The administration of President Dilma Rousseff has seen a continuation of this support of agribusiness sectors, and currently powerful congressional representatives—such as Kátia Abreu, a senator and president of the National Confederation of Agriculture (CNA)—are part of the PT governing coalition. The national campaign for *Educação do Campo* cannot be understood independently of these PT-agribusiness relations and the current economic context.

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<sup>154</sup> These include the CPMI da Terra in 2005, CPI das Ongs in 2009, and the CPMI do MST in 2010. (NOTE: A CPMI, as opposed to a CPI, is a mixed inquiry between both the congress and senate).

<sup>155</sup> The state Public Ministry in Rio Grande do Sul initiated a series of cases against the MST (from 2009-2011), and the TCU was the judicial body responsible for preventing the federal educational program PRONERA from functioning for two years (2009-2010).

### *Navigating Elite Capture*

Although Lula has come and gone from the Presidential office, *Educação do Campo* has remained a priority of the federal government. Since the presidential transition in 2010, there have been several important developments. First, an official coalition of legislators in the senate and congress in support of *Educação do Campo* formed, what is known as a Parliamentary Front. The Parliamentary Front's general objective is: "To Promote the improvement of federal legislation related to *Educação do Campo*."<sup>156</sup> Congressman Padre João of the PT—a former priest with strong connections to rural social movements in Minas Gerais—is currently the head of the Front. The Front includes over a hundred people from both the Congress and the Senate, who put pressure on the Ministry of Education and the President's Office to implement public policies in support of *Educação do Campo*. This pressure occurs through debates, hearings, research, publications, oversight of current programs, seminars, visits to states and municipalities, and the creation of institutional spaces for civil society to participate when discussing these ideas.<sup>157</sup> Congressman Padre João says<sup>158</sup> it was the MST and CONTAG who originally pushed for the formation of this parliamentary front.

A second development has been the creation of the National Forum for *Educação do Campo* (FONEC)—a coalition of sixteen different social movements, labor confederations and NGOs, as well as thirty-five institutions of higher education, which debate and strategize about the implementation of *Educação do Campo*. Founded in CONTAG's national headquarters on August 17, 2010, FONEC was first publically announced on November 5, 2010, simultaneously with the signing of the Presidential Decree. The founding of this organization was a response to the frustrations felt among civil society groups participating in the MEC's Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo*. These civil society groups wanted a space to "critically analyze the public policies of *Educação do Campo*, as an independent organization, and promote political actions that could help in the implementation, consolidation, and elaboration of propositions."<sup>159</sup> At a national meeting in Brasília in 2010, I witnessed the optimistic atmosphere that accompanied the public launching of FONEC: musical performances, dancing, singing, and a general excitement in the air about the possibilities for "taking back" *Educação do Campo*. The process of institutionalizing *Educação do Campo* within the MEC has not ended contestation; it has transformed the focus of that contestation within a new educational terrain.

A third development occurred on March 20, 2012, when President Dilma Rousseff formally launched a new federal program—the National Program for Countryside Education (*ProNoCampo*)—, which would dedicate unprecedented funds to education in the Brazilian countryside. This was intended to be a huge, inter-Ministry program, expanding the politics of *Educação do Campo* beyond a single office in the Ministry of Education and integrating it into all of the ministries that deal with rural development. The program proposed to give 1.9 million rural students access to libraries and transform the schedule in 10 thousand schools into "integral" school days.<sup>160</sup> It would also provide 100,000 teachers with a college education specific for the countryside, construct 3,000 new rural schools, implement significant

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<sup>156</sup> Parliamentary Front for *Educação do Campo* Statute, Article Two, signed July 6, 2011.

<sup>157</sup> Parliamentary Front for *Educação do Campo* Statute, signed July 6, 2011.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with congressman Padre João, November 17, 2011.

<sup>159</sup> National Forum for *Educação do Campo*, Founding Letter.

<sup>160</sup> Most rural schools function through "morning" and "afternoon" sessions, resulting in 3-4 hour school days. "Integral" schools are when only one group of students use the schools for the entire day, there is no rotation and multiple use of the same building.



infrastructural improvements to 30,000 other schools, build 20,000 computer labs, increase access to technical training for rural youth, reverse the trend of rural school closings, and purchase 8,000 buses, bicycles and boats to improve intra-rural school transport.<sup>161</sup> Vanderlúcia Simplicio, declares<sup>162</sup> *ProNoCampo* “marvelous on paper,” however, she worries that getting the proposals off the paper and into practice will be an entirely different political struggle.

Fourth and finally, the most controversial development has been the role agricultural businesses have played in these debates about *Educação do Campo*. Emblematic of this change is the combination of actors that were present at the table when President Rousseff announced the launching of *ProNoCampo* in March of 2012: Aloizio Mercadante, the new Minister of Education; José Wilson, a leader in CONTAG; and Kátia Abreu, the senator and President of the National Confederation of Agriculture (CNA). Abreu is one of the biggest public advocates of agribusiness, and infamous among MST activists for her hatred of the movement. While many MST activists were also present in the audience that day, they were not given a chance to speak publically. The speeches were illustrative, first, of the tremendous success the movement for *Educação do Campo* has had transforming national consciousness, and second, of the contemporary conflicts over the meaning of *Educação do Campo*.

The speech of the new Minister of Education, Aloizio Mercadante, was representative of the current hegemony of *Educação do Campo* within the federal government:<sup>163</sup> “We are sure that this program will contribute to the value placed on the populations of the countryside. Rapid urbanization is not the way forward. We need to value these populations, their stories and culture, and the huge contribution of rural workers to this country.” Less than a decade before, statements such as these from prominent public officials were few and far between. Quality education was considered universal education, which did not differentiate between urban and rural populations. Now, in 2012, the Minister of Education is referring to a “social debt” the government of Brazil owes populations living in the countryside, and their right to an education that addresses their particular needs.

The speech of CONTAG representative José Wilson illustrates the critical role social movements have played in this process, but also the tensions that still exist between these movements. The fact that a range of social movements, including MST activists, were allowed to attend a ceremony in which dozens of senators, congressmen, governors, mayors, Ministers, and the President herself were present, demonstrated both the degree of public credit given to these activists, and the activists’ willingness to be part of a public process in which they now played a peripheral role. The choice of a CONTAG activist to represent these social movements, as opposed to an MST activist, further demonstrates the marginal role the MST is allowed to play at this federal level. For the Brazilian government, CONTAG is a more reliable organization with a long history of collaboration with the state. Allowing the MST to speak at such a prestigious ceremony would have been controversial, especially given the PT government’s active support of agribusinesses over the previous decade.<sup>164</sup> Wilson, however, gave the MST a space to participate during his speech by pausing to allow Vanderlúcia Simplicio to deliver the recently

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<sup>161</sup> All of these goals were stated publically at the formal launching of *ProNoCampo*, on March 20, 2012. This ceremony can be watched online at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPtcdDSqcgk>>

<sup>162</sup> Informal conversation with Vanderlúcia in November of 2011.

<sup>163</sup> These speeches can be watched online: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPtcdDSqcgk>>

<sup>164</sup> Even in the first year of Lula’s first mandate, when he was still publically claiming he would implement a massive program for agrarian reform, he nominated Robert Rodrigues, a powerful ally of the agribusiness lobby, to be the Minister of Agriculture (Branford, 2009, p. 19).

published “Dictionary of *Educação do Campo*” (Caldart et al., 2012) to President Rousseff. In a typical MST-fashion,<sup>165</sup> Vanderlúcia marched around the room, reciting a political poem about agrarian reform, while proudly wearing an MST hat. The choice of CONTAG to formally represent the social movements, yet the informal inclusion of the MST, exemplifies the compromises these two organizations continue to make.

Finally, Kátia Abreu was invited to the podium amid loud hisses from the audience. As mentioned previously, Abreu is the head of a large agribusiness group in Brazil, which lobbies for policies that increase the efficiency and capacity of industrial agriculture.<sup>166</sup> Her presence at the ceremony is representative of the PT government’s support for industrial agriculture, partially as a strategy to fund the government’s expansive social programs. In addition to developing relations with President Rousseff’s government, Abreu is now, for the first time, publically becoming an advocate for *Educação do Campo*; although certainly her vision of this educational philosophy is not the same as the one the MST hopes to promote.

Abreu begins her speech, saying, “There have been decades of abandonment of the countryside . . . there are schools without Internet, without infrastructure, directors of schools absent, teachers earning much less than in the city.” Abreu went on to say that the past forty years of educational policies in the countryside have been focused on transporting students to urban areas. Thus, there have been no attempts to develop an education specific to the countryside. Up until this point, Abreu’s speech could have been given by any one of the many activists in the audience. However, ideological differences over the future development model of the countryside quickly became evident. To more hissing, Abreu exclaims, “Education is extremely important, so agribusiness can be more strong . . . The youth of the countryside need to be qualified workers, whether as salaried workers or as bosses, they need to advance more quickly.” In this statement, Abreu claims *Educação do Campo* as an educational proposal that supports agribusiness, in direct contrast to the origins of the proposal as an educational philosophy supporting small-scale, collective farming.

On the one hand, this situation is indicative of agribusiness’ long-standing practice of ‘elite capture’ of the Brazilian state. As Bruno (2008, pp. 92–93) explains, the preoccupation of the rural elite and agribusiness sectors with poverty emerged at the end of the 1990s, when the quality of life of poor populations began to be considered a ‘principle tool’ of Brazilian society, due to their potential as consumers. The emphasis agribusiness sectors are currently putting on education is a similar attempt to ensure that any investment in schooling in rural areas adheres to their vision of a qualified workforce that can support the expanding agribusiness sector. On the other hand, this situation also illustrates that *Educação do Campo* has become hegemonic in the Gramscian sense of providing the moral leadership for a multiclass alliance that functions to support the dominant mode of production. Through the language of *Educação do Campo*, the agribusiness lobby is able to present its own interests as the interest of all.<sup>167</sup> Contestation to this claim, however, immediately followed.

Six months after the public launching of *ProNoCampo*, and the excitement and hope that accompanied this ceremony, the National Forum for *Educação do Campo* (FONEC) wrote a lengthy report critiquing the entire program. In this article, FONEC (2012) argues that the rapid

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<sup>165</sup> Here, I am referring to the practice of *mística* within the movement: cultural performances of song, dance and poetry that occur before every meeting, school day, or MST event.

<sup>166</sup> Confederation of Agriculture and Livestock in Brazil (CNA).

<sup>167</sup> Burawoy (2003) refers to this as the hegemonic level of collective political consciousness, when “a class presents its own interests as the interests—present and future—of all” (p. 225).

recognition for *Educação do Campo* in the late 1990s was a result of a grassroots struggle, but also the historical moment: the traditional landlord class was in crisis and agribusinesses were not yet dominant in the countryside. It was during this brief historical crossroads that the proposal for *Educação do Campo* gained momentum. However, less than a decade later, agribusiness and transnational corporations are the dominant force in the Brazilian countryside. The article goes on to say that:

The recent investment in rural education by these dominant classes requires a special reflection. This investment illustrates an interest in appropriating a discourse that defends the education of rural workers, in order to affirm (and confuse) society into believing that agribusiness is also interested in overcoming inequality . . . This investment affirms that education has an important role in the maintenance of agribusiness. [FONEC 2012, 8]

This analysis confirms the argument that *Educação do Campo* now functions as a form of moral leadership, which helps “confuse” works into believing that the owners of big industrial farmers care about issues of poverty. For FONEC activists, this concern with poverty is diametrically opposed to agribusinesses’ primary interest: the pursuit of profit. The recent entrance of Kátia Abreu and other agribusiness groups into the debate about *Educação do Campo* is indicative of the role education continues to play in maintaining dominant social relations of production in Brazil. The MST first realized this important role of education in the early 1980s, when it became clear that maintaining youth in countryside and convincing them of the importance of fighting for agrarian reform would require an intervention in the public educational sphere.

MST activists and their allies have struggled for over a decade to transform the conception of “rural education” from something that is backwards, neglected, and destined to disappear, into a new sphere of intervention that can produce sustainable, intellectual farming communities in the countryside. For the MST, this conception of rural education is *explicitly* tied to an alternative development model, which is centered on workers’ ownership of their own means of production, and different forms of collective agricultural practices. As Fernandes (2012) writes, “It is impossible to dissociate the origin of *Educação do Campo* from agrarian reform.” The MST essentially created and then politicized what was until then a non-issue—rural education. Thus, the fact that agribusinesses are trying to incorporate the proposal into their own vision for the countryside illustrates both the MST’s successful war of position that has made this *Educação do Campo* common sense among Brazilian citizens, and the fact that this proposal is now one of the ways dominant sectors establish willing consent (a form of passive revolution).

### **“We never thought it would become this big”: Activist Reflections**

MST activists are well aware of the challenges they face, as *Educação do Campo* becomes more entrenched in the federal bureaucracy. Rosali Caldart, for example, admits<sup>168</sup> that she is unclear about *Educação do Campo*’s future path.

The fact is that that *Educação do Campo*, in its original construction, came from the social movements. But now it exists in relation to the governments, to the universities, or in other words, it exists in relation to these other subjects . . . *Educação do Campo* was not born pure, it was born in the middle of these relations, and these other subjects are also going to dispute the meaning of *Educação do Campo*. This is because *Educação do*

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<sup>168</sup> Interview with Rosali Caldart, January 17, 2011.

*Campo* is more than a project of education; it is a project of the countryside. Those that defend agro-business are going to have one vision of education, and those that defend peasant agriculture are going to have another educational project.

As Rosali articulates, the concept of *Educação do Campo* no longer belongs to the social movements who first developed the proposal; now dozens of other people, organizations, and movements are laying claim to these ideas. It was the success of the MST's mobilization for these educational ideas that made this process both necessary and inevitable. Rosali compares *Educação do Campo* to what happened with the concept of "popular education," the informal educational practices that got popularized due to Freire's literacy work and his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2002). Rosali says that the majority of "popular education" today has no real connection to the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, or revolutionary struggle. This is why some people have abandoned the term because it was being de-radicalized. For Rosali, the critical issue is not whether MST activists use the term "*Educação do Campo*"; what is important is that the movement defends an educational project that is linked to a vision of rural socialism.

Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, a professor at the State University of São Paulo (UNESP) and long-time MST supporter, disagrees with social movements turning their back on the phrase *Educação do Campo*. He believes that the MST should continue to be a part of these debates:

*Educação do Campo* was born within the MST, but it no longer belongs to the MST . . . there was one point that the MST was discussing whether the movement should continue fighting for *Educação do Campo*, since even the agro-business bloc has a program supporting *Educação do Campo*. I fought with the MST, and I argued that we have to maintain it. We cannot just give it up because others appropriated it. We are the originators of that name, and if we change the name of what we are fighting for, the new name will be appropriated also.

For Bernardo, the fact that *Educação do Campo* is in dispute illustrates the success the MST activists had had transforming the debate about public education. If the MST abandons this concept, and is equally successful promoting another idea, that too will be contested.

Salete Campigotto, one of the first MST activists involved in education in the early 1980s, also admits<sup>169</sup> that there are pros and cons to the expansion of *Educação do Campo*. On the one hand, it is a huge advance from what existed before: Youth in the countryside are studying, even going to college, which many rural families never thought would be possible. However, the negative side is that people no longer have to fight for what they get. Edgar Kolling says,<sup>170</sup> "The creation of SECAD in the MEC was a huge victory, now there is clearly more focus on education in the countryside . . . But the MST has been swallowed up in a lot of these SECAD programs, subsumed. We never thought we could create something so big." According to Edgar, MST activists never imagined this degree of expansion of *Educação do Campo*. However, he says, there is danger in expending the MST's energy engaging in this now massive educational realm.

Finally, Elisa Urbano Ramos, an indigenous woman and participant in the Pernambucan Committee for *Educação do Campo*,<sup>171</sup> also believes this has been a mixed development. She claims that *Educação do Campo* is necessary for all working-class populations in the

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<sup>169</sup> Interview with Salete Campigotto, January 13, 2011.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>171</sup> Similar to the Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo*, many State Secretaries of Education have also created similar civil society advisory councils.

countryside, including indigenous communities. However, she acknowledges that the voices of the movements are often missing from contemporary discussions. Elisa tells<sup>172</sup> a story about going to a local academic conference on *Educação do Campo*, where she was the only activists present. She got up and spoke, telling the participants that they should not forget the history of struggle when discussing *Educação do Campo*: “*Educação do Campo* was brought to us through conflicts, centuries of murder in the countryside. Blood was shed for these ideas to become legitimate.” As Elisa’s comments indicate, hegemony only shifts through concrete political struggle, even as it maintains its grasp on the dominant mode of economic production. Elisa is disappointed these histories are left out of academic debates about *Educação do Campo*.

## Conclusions

The case of the MST, and activists’ attempt to institutionalize the movement’s radical educational proposal in the Ministry of Education, illustrates the issues that arise when social movements succeed in implementing their goals, and when these new ideas become hegemonic. However, the story does not have a single message. There are multiple lessons this analysis offers us about institutional transformation and state-society interactions.

First, this chapter has implications for how we understand the role of framing and discourse within social movement struggles. The rise in the prominence of *Educação do Campo* in the late 1990s clearly illustrates the critical role of framing—one of the variables that social movement scholars often use to analyze movement success (Benford & Snow, 2000; Cress & Snow, 2000; McAdam et al., 1996b; McAdam, 1999; McCammon et al., 2007; Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow et al., 1986). However, framing not only succeeded in expanding the coalition of organizations and individuals involved in the struggle, but also had deep implications for shifting the goals of that struggle. CONTAG became a principal actor in the fight for *Educação do Campo*, pushing the struggle into a legal realm and also contesting the origins of these ideas. Thus, processes of framing can have unintended consequences for social movements. This also illustrates the need to focus on society-society relations—not only state-society relations—when analyzing institutional trajectories. Both CONTAG and the MST were transformed by their continual interactions, adapting to strategies and educational goals that were not part of their historical trajectories, and that then affected their relationship with state actors.

In addition, I concur with Steinberg (1999) that framing processes need to be situated within a theory of hegemonic politics. In this perspective framing appears as part of a war of position, whereby activists seek to transform “hegemonic genres” but are also constrained by the truths these discourses construct. Framing is not only a tool activists use to mobilize more people but also a process that can redefine the meaning and content of mobilization. As Steinberg (1999) writes, “The multivocal nature of discourse provides the means for challengers to find gaps, contradictions, and silences in this taken-for-grantedness of hegemonic genres. By exposing them, challengers can inject alternative meanings to articulate their sense of justice and moral authority for collective action” (p. 751). The MST’s framing of their educational proposal as *Educação do Campo* was part of the movement’s war of position to create a new common sense concerning rural education in Brazil. Activists were able to utilize the dominant discourses about education—for example, those promoted by international organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF—and insert their new discursive message within this hegemonic sphere. The ways in

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Elisa Urbano Ramos, July 16, 2012.

which activists construct meaning through language is a central to analyzing social movement trajectories, and framing has a lot to contribute within a theory of hegemonic politics.

Second, this chapter has illustrated the risks of incorporating movement initiatives into existing institutions. As Piven and Cloward argued three decades ago, activists who work in institutional settings can create a demobilizing effect for their movements. This occurs because, “political leaders, or elites allied with them, will try to quiet disturbances not only by dealing with immediate grievances, but by making efforts to channel the energies and angers of the protestors into more legitimate and less disruptive forms of political behavior” (Piven & Cloward, 1977, p. 30).<sup>173</sup> Several aspects of this chapter corroborate these arguments about the risks of activists working in the institutional realm: the *Educação do Campo* office remains isolated within the MEC’s hierarchical structure; the mass implementation of LEDOC university courses has prevented sustained movement participation; and a World Bank initiative has become the largest *Educação do Campo* program in the Ministry. Antonio Munarim even claims that the Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo* demobilized the larger national movement.<sup>174</sup> These examples all illustrate the barriers that activists face as they engage with state institutions. Furthermore, as *Educação do Campo* became hegemonic and supported by a multiclass alliance, it served as a form of consent for a mode of economic production the MST was trying to contest. This also aligns with Piven and Cloward, who argue that state concessions always “turn out to be compatible (or at least not incompatible) with the interests of the more powerful groups, most importantly with the interest of dominance economic groups” (p. 35). Here, the relative benefit of social movement institutionalization versus the consequences of this process for social movement mobilization is clearly in question.

Nonetheless, this chapter also illustrates that despite the perils of institutionalization, social movements can significantly shift national debates and policies concerning the provision of public goods in their communities. Piven and Cloward (1977) themselves assert that, “What was won must be judged by what was possible” (p. xiii). The fact that the MST has been able to reverse the trend towards closing down rural schools, legitimize the idea that rural schools should have a differentiated educational approach than urban schools, and create hundreds of educational programs specifically designated for rural populations, is still significant. Currently, the idea of *Educação do Campo* is hegemonic, which means that certain public discourses—such as rural areas as “backwards,” urban schools as superior to rural schools, and universal curriculum as essential to helping rural youth adapt to an urban job market—are no longer legitimate. The “terrain of educational struggle” is not the same as it was in the early 1990s. Agribusinesses can still contest the relationship between *Educação do Campo* and models of rural development—asserting that this educational approach encompasses their vision for large-scale industrial agriculture—however, these agribusiness interests cannot contest the importance of expanding the access to and the quality of education in the countryside. This has not always been the case. Furthermore, there is a now space within Brazilian universities to study these educational issues, which Rojas (2007) refers to as a “counter center,” which allows for oppositional consciousness within a state institution (p. 21). Therefore, the MST and CONTAG’s success shifting the hegemony surrounding rural education in Brazil has had real material implications for thousands of youth and adults living in the countryside.

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<sup>173</sup> Foweraker (2001) makes a similar claim specifically about the MST, asserting that since the MST developed in continual and intimate interaction with the state, the MST has had a tendency to institutionalize, depend on state resources, and resemble an NGO more than a mobilized social movements (p. 842).

<sup>174</sup> Interview Antonio Munarim, November 28, 2011.

In conclusion, despite the current disputes over the meaning of *Educação do Campo*, and the dominance of agribusiness groups in these debates, activists in the MST and CONTAG—through their interactions with MEC bureaucrats—have re-defined the boundaries within which future discussions and policy decisions about public education will take place. Activists express genuine surprise at the degree of influence they have had in the educational realm, but also ambivalence as to whether or not this new approach to rural education will facilitate the transformation in economic relations of production they want to see in the countryside. However, was institutionalizing an educational approach directly supporting rural socialism even feasible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the context of a left-leaning government that was only able to maintain power through its support of big-agribusiness? The next chapter will illustrate that in a different institutional context, this type of radical educational proposal is indeed possible.

## Chapter 5: Occupying the Universities: A Counter-Hegemonic Trajectory within INCRA

On August 11, 2012, forty-seven students graduated from the Federal University of Goiás with bachelor degrees in law.<sup>175</sup> Unlike most law cohorts, this group was entirely made up of youth from agrarian reform settlements and occupied encampments, the majority of whom were activists in the MST. Also in contrast to other law programs, these students were not required to leave their rural communities to pursue their degrees; the program was organized so they could spend most of the year at home farming and engaging in other community projects, and then study together at the university for intensive 2-3 month periods. Furthermore, these study-periods did not use traditional pedagogy; rather, the program drew on educational approaches developed by MST activists over the previous three decades. Several seasoned activists from the MST were overseeing the classes, together with university faculty. This was the first law program funded through the National Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA), and the hope—at least for the MST—was for graduates to become activist-lawyers in the movement.

This federal educational program, PRONERA, is one of the MST's greatest educational victories in the public sphere. It has allowed thousands of activists to pursue bachelor degrees through university programs that utilize the movement's distinct organizational and curricular approach towards schooling. Housed in the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), an agency in the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MDA), PRONERA's structure allows MST activists to participate in the development and oversight of all courses.

As the previous chapter outlined, the MST's success in institutionalizing the movement's educational initiatives in the Ministry of Education (MEC) has not resulted in similarly high levels of social movement participation within the new programs. While activists have managed to shift the national debate over rural education in significant ways, turning *Educação do Campo*<sup>176</sup> into the hegemonic approach towards rural education in Brazil, activists have also lost much of their direct control of these programs. In contrast, the MST has been able to ensure that INCRA's implementation of PRONERA closely adheres to the movement's socialist educational vision.

Why did the process of institutionalizing the MST's educational ideas in INCRA and the MEC have such a different outcomes? In this chapter I analyze PRONERA's institutional trajectory and argue that three primary reasons account for these differences. The first factor is the national context in which PRONERA was created in 1998. It was a moment of intense government hostility—still at the end of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's (PSDB) first term in office—and several years before *Educação do Campo* became hegemonic at the national level (under the Workers Party (PT) government). This meant that in the mid-1990s, the MST was still the only rural organization promoting this educational approach, and thus participating

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<sup>175</sup> In Brazil law degrees are at the bachelor level, unlike the U.S. where it is a post-bachelors degree.

<sup>176</sup> For people who did not read my previous chapter: *Educação do Campo* is the name that the MST's educational pedagogies took on in the late 1990s, when the movement decided to expand its educational project beyond areas of agrarian reform and frame it as a pedagogy appropriate for all populations in the countryside. Since this shift in framing, there have been hundreds of rural organizations that have embraced this educational approach. However, my argument in the previous chapter is that *Educação do Campo* is “hegemonic” in the Gramscian sense of *providing moral leadership for a multiclass alliance functioning to support the dominant mode of production*. Thus, this “hegemony” is both an illustration of the MST's power, and a critique of how it was embraced by elites in a way that transformed its intent.



in the creation of PRONERA. There was not a yet a multi-class coalition of rural social movements supporting these educational ideas. Furthermore, because PRONERA was created in an antagonistic political environment, the MST had to remain mobilized for the program to continue. This directly affected the future state-society relations surrounding the program.

The second factor that affected PRONERA's future was the form of the first MST-university degree program. This first program—which took place at a small private university in the Southern part of Brazil—was both radical and participatory, pushing the boundaries of traditional university pedagogies. This was possible due to that particular university's progressive history. Nonetheless, even in this context, the MST's pedagogical approach and the university's educational logic clashed, illustrating to activists the contradictions that develop when social movements enter the institutional sphere. The students who graduated from this program—three-fourths of whom continued to be activists in the movement (see Table 1)—learned that the MST's close monitoring of all future PRONERA programs would be necessary.

The third factor affecting PRONERA's trajectory is the nature of the government agency that currently administers PRONERA. In contrast to the Ministry of Education, INCRA has a participatory institutional culture, partially due to the agency's weaker capacity to implement policy goals (Wolford, 2010a). In addition, INCRA bureaucrats have much closer, personal relationships with activists. Furthermore, while MEC bureaucrats must profess a claim on educational expertise, PRONERA bureaucrats—who are trained to deal with broader issues of agrarian reform, not education—feel less threatened by the MST's pedagogical proposal. Finally, INCRA adheres to a bottom-up process of program implementation, requiring universities and activists—not just government bureaucrats—to develop each new course proposal. This chapter's focus on the different characteristics of the “institutions” into which movement goals become “institutionalized” is often missing from discussion of social movement trajectories.

Together, these three factors—the moment of institutionalization, the form of the first PRONERA course, and the nature of INCRA—have produced an educational program that is a unique example of socialist education in a modern capitalist state. The program is both institutionalized—as a permanent program within INCRA—and counter-hegemonic, since its existence is still contested by the media, government officials, and state bureaucrats. This led to a legal banning of the program for two years, between 2008 and 2010, and required the mobilization of dozens of civil society groups and government officials to lift the ban. Furthermore, this educational program has directly contributed to the MST's internal mobilization capacity, as thousands of leaders in the movement have graduated from these programs. This outcome contradicts the traditional Piven and Cloward thesis, which argues that, “it is not possible to compel concessions from elites that can be used as resources to sustain oppositional organization over time” (Piven & Cloward, 1977, p. xxi).

In this chapter, I argue that a single social movement attempting to incorporate similar educational goals in different state institutions can produce divergent outcomes—for the nature of the institutionalized goals and for the movements own levels of mobilization. Unlike the story told in Chapter 4—in which MST activists aligned with other rural social movements and incorporated their educational goals into the Ministry of Education, successfully shifting the national debate about rural education but losing the more radical aspects of their educational proposal—in this chapter I analyze how MST activists have been able to maintain the radical components of the movement's educational ideas in a different institutional context. Although other scholars have made the point that social movements have multiple trajectories, which can oscillate between radical and conservative tendencies at different points in time, these studies

tend to focus on internal movement dynamics (Clemens, 1993; Martin, 2008; Voss & Sherman, 2000).<sup>177</sup> In contrast, I focus on the nature of state-society relations—the interactions between activists, bureaucrats, professors, and other government officials—and why these relationships are critical for analyzing the outcomes produced when activists engage in the institutional realm.

### **Creating PRONERA: Education’s “Free Ride” to Brasília**

The period between 1996 and 1998 was an unusual moment in Brazilian history. First, it was a period of intense contestation between the MST and the Brazilian state, as federal, state, and municipal governments across Brazil were taking hardline stances against the movement. Furthermore, it was a moment of high levels of MST mobilization, when activists were capable of organizing the largest marches in the history of the movement and hundreds of new land occupations were occurring across the country. Finally, in addition to these conflicts and high levels of political mobilizations, this was a moment of “elite” support for the MST, with many international organizations and powerful domestic groups advocating for agrarian reform.

Representative of the complex interactions between these different forces—an antagonistic state, movement mobilization, and elite support—were the events following the massacre of eleven MST activists in Rondônia in August of 1995, and the murder of nineteen MST activists in Pará on April 17, 1996. The latter event became nationally known as the massacre of *Eldorado dos Carajás* and caused an international scandal as the shootings were caught on film. Consequently, there was both domestic and international political pressure on President Cardoso to take responsibility for these murders. President Cardoso declared on public television that, “There can be no justification for the police shooting people just because they are expressing their opinions . . . It is unacceptable. It is unjustifiable. It is an embarrassment for the country and for the republic” (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 145). Shortly after, the President made dozens of concessions to the MST. First, he detached the national agrarian reform agency—INCRA—from the Ministry of Agriculture and created the “Extraordinary Ministry of Agrarian Issues,” which would now house INCRA and report directly to the president. The President then directed INCRA to expropriate dozens of land estates MST activists were occupying, including the area where the families of the activists shot in Pará were living.

By 1998, the end of Cardoso’s first term, 260,000 families had received access to 8 million hectares of land through expropriation—almost double the amount of land given in the previous ten years (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 199). Thus, a hostile political climate in the mid-1990s, alongside high levels of MST mobilization and the presence of domestic and international allies, led to both violent conflict and state concessions. These developments had direct consequences for the MST’s educational project. As MST leader Edgar Kolling says, “the MST’s education sector got a free ride (*corona*) on the tail of this national mobilization.”<sup>178</sup> In other words, the blood shed in the massacres fed into the subsequent educational concessions.

Just three months after the MST’s 100,000 person march to Brasília, two of the movement’s most powerful international allies, UNESCO and UNICEF, agreed to finance the MST’s first “National Meeting of Educators in Areas of Agrarian Reform” (ENERA), which occurred in July of 1997. The provost at the University of Brasília (UnB)—also a supporter of the MST and one of the many outraged by the massacres—agreed to host this national conference. The original

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<sup>177</sup> For example, Voss and Sherman analyze the internal bureaucratization of labor unions, *not* labor activists’ interactions with government officials.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

plan was for 400 people to attend the first ENERA conference, but in the end, over 700 people participated (Caldart et al., 2012, p. 503), indicating the outpouring of support for educational access in areas of agrarian reform.

By July of the following year, MST activists—pressured by UNESCO, UNICEF, and university professors—would re-frame the movement’s educational proposal as *Educação do Campo*, to include other rural social movements (see Chapter 3). However, in 1997 the educational debate was still focused entirely on areas of agrarian reform: locations where a land occupation was taking place or where the government had appropriated land to create an agrarian reform settlement. The MST was the principal organization in these land reform struggles,<sup>179</sup> and therefore, “education in areas of agrarian reform” essentially referred to educational initiatives in MST communities. The major demand that came out of the ENERA conference in 1997 was for the federal government to create an educational program specifically designated for areas of agrarian reform. In October of that same year, representatives from six universities met to discuss how their institutions could support the MST in creating this new program.<sup>180</sup> As one of the many concessions made that year, President Cardoso agreed to develop this type of program, resulting in the creation of PRONERA (the National Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform) that same year. The support of professors was critical; according to Monica Molina, the director of PRONERA from 2003 to 2006, the provost of the University of Brasília had connections within the government and facilitated the President’s support for the new program.<sup>181</sup>

This timing was also significant. Five years later, during President Lula’s first term in office, the Ministry of Education developed a series of educational programs to support *Educação do Campo* (see Chapter 4). These programs were a response to the demands of a national coalition of rural social movements and NGOs, which came together after MST activists re-framed their proposal as relevant for all rural populations. In contrast, President Cardoso’s decision to create PRONERA in 1997 was a response to the demands of one movement—the MST—*not* a coalition of rural social movements. Therefore, the MST became a single privileged actor in the development of PRONERA over the next decade. Furthermore, PRONERA funding was exclusively for populations living in areas of agrarian reform.

Clarice dos Santos, the current director of PRONERA, also discusses the importance of this historical moment. Clarice concurs that the MST’s mobilizations and the first ENERA meeting in 1997 provoked the creation of this government program. She says outspoken provosts and professors were also critical in illustrating to the government that the initiative had a broader public support. Santos mentions several other factors: the recent massacre of 19 MST activists; the national support for agrarian reform; the fact that it was an election year; and the death of Paulo Freire in 1997. Santos says, “President Fernando Henrique needed to give society an answer, and he did not have any other project to propose.”<sup>182</sup> Similarly, the PRONERA director

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<sup>179</sup> In the mid-1990s the MST was still the primary actor organizing land occupations.

<sup>180</sup> The professors wrote a program proposal, which they eventually presented and had approved at the Third Forum of the “Provost Advisory Board of Brazilian Universities,” which took place in November of 1997. The representatives that met in October were from the University of Brasília (UnB), Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), University of Vale dos Rios dos Sinos (UNISINOS), the Regional University of the Northeast of Rio Grande do Sul (UNIJUI), the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), and the State University of Júlio de Mesquita Filho (UNESP). (Pronera Manual, 2012)

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Monica Molina, November 10, 2010.

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Clarice dos Santos, November 8, 2010.

from 2003 to 2006, Monica Molina, says, “There were so many contradictions in Fernando Henrique’s government. It was the end of his first mandate, it was a period of election, the two massacres had just happened, and there was a sensitivity in Brazilian society to the issue of agrarian reform . . . But it was principally the massacres, PRONERA was born out of the massacres.”<sup>183</sup> According to this account, the MST’s educational proposal directly benefited from President Cardoso’s attempt to mitigate the negative publicity caused by these murders.

Hence, on April 17, 1998—the two-year anniversary of the massacre of *Eldorado dos Carajás*—President Cardoso signed off on the creation of PRONERA within the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MDA), and in 2001 PRONERA was incorporated into INCRA’s Department of Settlement Development. Edgar Kolling admits that the MST had originally wanted PRONERA to be administered by the Ministry of Education. However, the Minister of Education at that time, Paulo Renato, refused to meet with MST activists.<sup>184</sup> This shows that PRONERA’s location within INCRA was a historically contingent occurrence, which resulted in part from the antagonism between the movement and President Cardoso’s government. President Cardoso’s support for PRONERA came with minimal financial commitment. The program only received 600,000 *reais* during its first year of operation. This greatly constrained PRONERA’s programs. Although this budget increased slightly over the next four years, it was not until President Lula took office in 2003 that PRONERA had a surge in financial support.

Despite these financial limitations, the creation of PRONERA allowed for an expansion of literacy programs and adult education programs in areas of agrarian reform between 1998 and 2002. In its first year, PRONERA funded approximately 5,000 educators across Brazil to engage in adult literacy work in MST settlements and camps (Caldart et al., 2012). These literacy programs helped the MST sustain itself—ideologically and financially. Ideologically, the programs utilized a Freirean educational approach that encouraged communities to reflect about the structural reasons for their poverty, and discuss concrete political actions to address these conditions. Financially, literacy agents paid through these programs were either MST activists—who no longer needed to be financially supported by the movement—or students that became MST activists through this work. In both cases, their teaching allowed them the flexibility to participate in the movement, thus becoming government-funded activists. For these reasons, in addition to concerns about illiteracy, MST activists pushed to expand PRONERA.<sup>185</sup>

### **Blazing the Way: The First MST-University Degree Program**

The first university bachelor degree program funded through PRONERA took place between 1998 and 2002. The form that this first program took had a lasting impact on all future PRONERA university programs. First, the origins of this degree program in a small, left-leaning private university allowed the MST to experiment with educational pedagogies that other universities might have been wary to support. Second, even in this favorable context, the MST’s pedagogies and the university’s institutional logic sometimes clashed, illustrating to the movement the uncertain nature of “university partnerships” and engraining the need for activists’ participation in all future programs. Third, and finally, this program had a lasting effect on the forty-eight graduates, two-thirds of whom remained MST activists. Many of these graduates became the heads of education collectives in their own state, developing proposals for regional

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<sup>183</sup> Interview with Monica Molina, November 10, 2010.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Professor Munarim, November 28, 2011.

PRONERA programs. This is evidence that activists' participation in formal institutions does not necessarily de-radicalize. To the contrary, these programs became "privileged spaces"<sup>186</sup> in which activists could solidify their pedagogical practices. I analyze the origins, conflicts, and impacts of this first program, and how it contributed to PRONERA's counter-hegemonic trajectory.

### ***Origins: The University of Ijuí Experiment***

In the mid-1990s, well before the MST's educational initiatives began to receive national recognition, MST activists were already overseeing dozens of educational programs across the country—from literacy programs to teacher-certification high school courses. Activists who joined the movement with less than a high school education were quickly sent off to complete these degrees, illustrating the MST's investment in activists' formal education. Although the MST had legal recognition from municipal, state, and federal governments to provide primary and secondary schooling to movement activists, there were no formal educational opportunities administered by the MST beyond high school.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, it was difficult for activists to pursue bachelor's degrees because the entrance exams were difficult and entering a public university left little time for activism. Thus, in the late 1990s when PRONERA was created almost none of the thousands of MST activists across the country held a college degree.

Rubneuz Leandro, an MST activist from Pernambuco, explains why getting these degrees in higher education was important to the movement:

When you are in the movement, you are an activist twenty-four hours a day; you are always at the disposition of the movement. It is hard to fit in the routine of formal education, because you would have to stop your activism to study. Lots of people were doing this, leaving the movement, because we had reached the ceiling of the level of education activists could attain through the movement. We also needed higher degrees to receive respect from people. The professors at universities would not respect us; we had hit a limit because we did not have higher degrees. However, we decided we did not want to study in any type of higher education; we started analyzing how we would offer university education to activists.<sup>188</sup>

As Rubneuz explains, the MST's concern about the lack of access to higher education was a question of respect: public officials, university professors, and civil society groups saw MST activists as "uneducated." Regardless of the fact that these activists spent decades studying in informal MST courses—engaging in theoretical debates and reading graduate-level texts about capitalist development, agrarian history, and politics—non-institutional educational contexts did not garner respect. Furthermore, the MST was worried that if it did not offer tertiary degrees, activists would start pursuing opportunities outside of the purview of the movement. Thus, although the creation of PRONERA in 1998 resulted in a huge expansion of literacy programs that became important for sustaining the movement, MST activists were not satisfied. They approached dozens of public universities proposing the creation of a degree program in

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<sup>186</sup> This wording comes from an interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>187</sup> I use the word "formal" to qualify this statement because the MST offers countless opportunities for activists to study outside of the formal/institutional realm. Rubneuz says that between getting a high school degree and attending the first MST-university course in 1998, she spent six years "out of school," but was constantly studying, reading, and learning through informal educational MST courses.

<sup>188</sup> Interview with Rubneuz Leandro, July 22, 2011.

pedagogy for teachers working in schools in areas of agrarian reform without higher education. This search for “respect” did not receive any traction. Although the provosts in many public universities, like the University of Brasília, were overwhelmingly in support of the MST’s educational initiatives—especially the literacy programs—none were willing to offer a university degree program specifically for the movement. Edgar Kolling interprets this hesitance negatively, saying that although activists were continually invited to give talks at these universities about their educational initiatives, “the idea that *sem terra* [landless people] could come to the university to study, as peers, was intolerable.”<sup>189</sup> For university faculty, partnering with MST activists to develop literacy programs was acceptable and even encouraged, but allowing the movement to be involved in the provision of higher education would be an inappropriate relationship. These universities needed to maintain a monopoly on the production of knowledge, and this eclipsed professors’ desire to support the MST’s educational initiatives.

The MST’s attempt to access higher education might have ended in 1998, if not for one small private university located in a medium-sized town in the southern part of Brazil—the University of Ijuí. After a continual stream of rejections, the MST convinced a group of professors at this university to accept the movement’s proposal to create a bachelor degree program in pedagogy for MST activists. This program became known nationally as the “Pedagogy of Land” university degree program, and was the first of many PRONERA would fund over the next decade.

Why did the faculty members at the University of Ijuí agree to offer a degree program for MST activists, when dozens of public universities across the country had refused? I asked several professors at the University of Ijuí responsible for overseeing the Pedagogy of Land program why they had partnered with the MST. They pointed out several historical factors that facilitated this process, such as faculty’s history of working with social movements, their clandestine organizing during the dictatorship, and the University of Ijuí’s status as a private, less prominent university.<sup>190</sup> As these professors explained, when the College of Philosophy, Science and Literature (FAFI) was founded in 1956—which became the University of Ijuí in 1985—professors were already directly connected to grassroots groups. The faculty at FAFI had even helped to create a municipal-wide initiative in participatory governance, known as the “Base Community Movement,” which allowed citizens to discuss local problems and hold officials responsible through a deliberative process. The professors were also connected to the liberation theology and popular education movements. Thus, from the beginning the line between these professors’ university work and their activism was blurred.

For example, Professor Dinarte Belato, one of the key actors in approving the PRONERA program, arrived at the University of Ijuí in 1963 as a philosophy student. He expressed how exciting this historical moment was. Society was literally “boiling” with grassroots work—there was a huge student movement at the university, progressive Catholic groups were strong, and popular education was getting more recognition. Professors like Belato never lost their connection to these grassroots movements, and moreover, they saw themselves as activists within the university. This grassroots organizing came to an abrupt halt in 1964, with the military dictatorship. However, even under this period of repression professors at the University of Ijuí developed popular education projects, albeit clandestinely. For example, the professors held

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<sup>189</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>190</sup> When I contacted the primary person responsible for the Pedagogy of Land program, Dinarte Belato, he told me he did not want to meet for an individual interview. The course, he claimed, was a collective process, and therefore he wanted a collective interview to take place. He offered to organize a roundtable interview with several of the professors. The following information is from that collective interview.

literacy classes for construction workers, helping them develop a political consciousness. The fact that the university was private and more independent from the military state facilitated faculty members' ability to engage in this covert work. Then, during the democratic transition in the early 1980s, there was an explosion of grassroots organizing. As professors that engaged in political organizing during the dictatorship, Belato and others were well positioned to connect with these emerging movements. The professors began a Permanent Seminar for Popular Education (SPEP) for social movements in the region, including the MST.

In 1998, after the MST's proposal for creating a bachelor degree program in pedagogy had been rejected by dozens of public universities, activists approached the University of Ijuí with their proposal. Professor Dinarte Belato remembers this moment:<sup>191</sup> "They asked who can do this course? Who has a pedagogical proposal that is able to do this? And we said we were able to do this! We already had these past experiences . . . and we knew the professors here could support this type of course. There was legitimacy and capacity within the university." This "legitimacy and capacity" was a product of decades of underground organizing during the dictatorship. These professors prided themselves on maintaining these relationships during a repressive military regime. This historical memory convinced them to take on the risky task of creating a bachelor degree program specifically for the MST activists.

### ***Conflicts: Sem Terra in the University***

The university degree program in pedagogy began almost immediately, before the end of 1998, the first year that PRONERA was created. Over fifty MST activists from fifteen different states—many of whom were already prominent leaders in state MST education collectives—were chosen to be part of this "Pedagogy of Land" cohort.<sup>192</sup> Although activists graduated with a regular diploma from the University of Ijuí, students took classes separately from the rest of the university's student body and activists and professors designed the program to cater to the movement's needs. However, this "search for respect," and the MST's move into the university sphere, was not a smooth or conflict-free process. Even at the University of Ijuí where professors had a history of activism and were supportive of the MST's political goals, the tensions between the MST's pedagogical approach and the university's educational logic clashed.

The group of professors overseeing the PRONERA program embraced many of the MST's pedagogical, curricular, and organizational proposals. For example, professors were supportive of the new organizational structure the movement suggested, which is known within the MST as the *pedagogia da alternância* (pedagogy of rotation). This pedagogical approach allows students to alternative between intense 2-3 month "study periods" and longer "community periods" when students return to their communities and apply the theory they are learning to practice. This allows rural students to study, without abandoning their farms. These extended community periods also permitted the students to continue fulfilling activist commitments. PRONERA funded the costs of travel, housing, food, and other basic necessities. Thus, during the Pedagogy of Land program students were flown to the University of Ijuí twice a year for four years to participate in a total of eight study periods. For the 4-6 months between study periods, activists returned home with a long list of readings to complete and a "community research project" to

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<sup>191</sup> Roundtable interview at the University of Ijuí, November 30, 2010.

<sup>192</sup> The MST had complete control over which activists would take this course in 1998. Although the MST continues to have influence over who enters a PRONERA program, it is more standardized than it was in 1998 and generally there is some kind of entrance exam that students must take. However, it is the MST that publicizes that this test is going to take place in settlements, encouraging dedicated activists to apply.

develop. The final theses were based on these four years of research. Professors were enthusiastic about this emphasis on community research. For example, Belato talked at length about research being the central pedagogical innovation of PRONERA, and he spent several hours showing me the final papers that students in the MST cohort had written.<sup>193</sup>

The traditional fragmentation between different disciplines was also addressed through a new curricular organization of the bachelor program. Instead of every study period consisting of several isolated classes, there was a thematic “axis” that tied each study period together. These “thematic axes” were chosen through a collective discussion at the beginning of each study period, allowing for students to debate about the topics they felt were significant. Judite Strozake, an MST activist from Paraná, says,<sup>194</sup> “Every study period we would bring different demands about what should be the focus of that period, what should be studied the most.” The “thematic axes” provided common ground for students getting their teacher certificates in different disciplines. Again, professors were generally supportive of this new interdisciplinary approach, since it did not necessarily affect the classes they would teach. Belato explains: “There was no longer a math class, or a science class . . . people would construct their own knowledge, but then they came together to connect their discipline’s knowledge to the common theme.”

The Pedagogy of Land program at the University of Ijuí also utilized the MST’s principle of *auto-gestão* (self-governance). This principle of self-governance rejects the traditional hierarchy between administrators, teachers and students—whereby students simply come to the university to “learn”—by putting students at the center of every decision-making process. Thus, when the MST activists arrived at the University of Ijuí, no one had set up their housing, meals, daily tasks, or childcare. Collectively, the students had to figure out where they were going to live, how to use PRONERA funding for food, and rules for collective housing. Edna Rossetta, an activist from Bahía, remembers the role of childcare in particular. She says, “The joke was that the class liked to reproduce, because every study period there were more and more kids.”<sup>195</sup> In a regular university course students drop out when they become parents, but for this cohort pregnancy was expected and children were a collective responsibility. This form of self-governance was familiar to most activists, as they had collectively governed their camps and settlements for many years.

One professor at the University of Ijuí remembers that other students were resentful of the MST’s capacity to organize these extra aspects of the program.<sup>196</sup> They complained to the professors, asking why the MST had childcare and collective meals. These students were jealous of the MST activists and critical that activists were not required to take a traditional entrance exam to study. However, the MST was able to overcome these tensions and win the support of many students. Vanderlúcia Simplicio, a graduate from Ceará, remembers that initially other students did not interact with the MST activists. She says, “But once they got to know us they began to like us . . . on Saturdays we had cultural activities, we threw a big party, and they began to participate in our activities. We would collect money and make sweet potatoes, food, song, and dance. We would have cultural nights and everyone would come to join us.”<sup>197</sup> Vanderlúcia describes these parties as offering students a political outlook. In this way, the Pedagogy of Land

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<sup>193</sup> Roundtable interview at the University of Ijuí, November 30, 2010.

<sup>194</sup> Interview with Judite Strozake, January 31, 2011.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Edna Araujo Rossetto, October 21, 2011.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Professor Paulo Zarth, November 30, 2010.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with Vanderlúcia Simplicio, November 9, 2010.



cohort was politicizing the entire university. Through benign cultural activities such as parties, activists were able to dialogue with other students about the movement's larger political goals.

The logistical, organizational, and pedagogical tasks of the Pedagogy of Land program were carried out through another practice that the MST promotes: *nucleação* (small group formation). In MST camps and settlements families are organized into small collectives known as base nucleuses (NBs). In the educational sphere, these NBs consist of collectives of students who form the organizational base of the school—debating issues that arise, taking on logistical tasks, studying collectively, and supporting each other throughout the program. In addition, each day a NB is responsible for classroom facilitation, taking attendance, leading discussion, and discipline. The NBs also evaluate professors after each class, offering feedback for improvement.

Although the group of professors overseeing the Pedagogy of Land program were supportive of this student involvement, other professors who taught classes for the program refused to adhere to the MST's organizational dynamic. Adilio Perin, a graduate and current principal in Rio Grande do Sul, recalls that, "There was one math class where the professor taught a lot of information that had nothing to do with our reality. He would just enter, give his lecture, and leave everything on the board for us to study. He would not even talk to the class, he did not care who we were." Another graduate from Rio Grande do Sul, Rita de Cascia, remembers similar conflicts that developed. Students would go to class to debate and afterwards evaluate the professors. Many professors were resentful of this evaluation process. Again, the institutional norms of the university—and the traditional role of the professor as depositing knowledge into the minds of the students (Freire, 2002)—came into conflict with the MST's practice of incorporating student knowledge and collectively evaluating the educational experience.

In addition to the NBs there was also a "pedagogical accompaniment collective," composed of seasoned MST activists who offered advice, guidance, and support to the professors and students. This pedagogical accompaniment collective, which included seasoned MST educational activists such as Edgar Kolling, Rosali Caldart, and Isabel Camini,<sup>198</sup> already had experience overseeing the MST's other educational programs across the country. Many of the conflicts that developed over the four-year program occurred between the members of this pedagogical accompaniment collective—who had strong feelings of ownership over the Pedagogy of Land program—and the professors who saw themselves as the ones in charge of overseeing the program. For example, one conflict was over curriculum. The MST activists in the pedagogical accompaniment team wanted to make sure that the educational theorists who made up the backbone of the movement's pedagogical proposal—such as the Soviet theorists discussed in Chapter 3—were included in the program. The pedagogical accompaniment team also wanted students to read Paulo Freire, study the history of agrarian reform, and read MST publications. The professors had their own ideas about the proper content of a university-level pedagogy class, and insisted that the PRONERA program adhere to this traditional curriculum.

Consequently, the pedagogical accompaniment team had to assign many of the readings they valued in the evenings or on weekends. For example, if they wanted an outside intellectual to teach the students, such as national MST leader João Pedro Stédile, these lectures would have to take place in parallel with the other university classes. Elizabete Witcel, a graduate from Rio Grande do Sul, remembers the critical role of these extra study periods. "We were busy studying, we did not have time for other meetings and political formation, but we had to ask ourselves, do

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<sup>198</sup> These are the same activists who were involved in developing the teacher training courses in the city of Braga, discussed in Chapter 2. They have also published extensively on the movement's educational proposal, see: (Caldart, 2004a; Camini, 2009).

we value the education in the academy more than our own reality?”<sup>199</sup> Activists refused to suppress their own knowledge, but due to the university’s institutional constraints they had to create other spaces to study these materials. As Rosali Caldart says, “The base of the course was the university’s curriculum, but all of the extras, the spices, were from the movement.”

According to MST leader Edgar Kolling, the movement’s insistence on “extra” studying offended some professors. Edgar explains, “A big challenge is that the professors thought their contribution to the course was ‘knowledge,’ it is hard for them to think of knowledge as learning together.”<sup>200</sup> Although professors such as Belato were more open to this participation, the idea that MST activists had the capacity to determine the curricular content of a university degree program created resentment. Furthermore, Edgar explains, the recent rise of post-modernism in the academy posed problems: “It is a theoretical perspective that does not work with our outlook because we think subjects can be active changers through struggle.” In referring negatively to “post-modernism,” Edgar is expressing a commonly held feeling among MST activists that the academy values many theories that deny the agency people have to change the world. For the MST, theories that simply “deconstruct agency” and “decenter power” do not help activists contest oppression. The fact that these theories are now dominant in the academy is indicative of an increasing divide between the knowledge produced through the university, and the knowledge about power and contestation that comes out of social movements.

The conflict over who had the right to define the curriculum did not just develop between MST activists and faculty members; some students within the Pedagogy of Land cohort also resented the extra work the MST required them to complete. These internal divides created yet another conflict with the university, as professors disregarded the MST’s collective disciplinary practices and supported students’ individual choice not to do this extra work. Elizabete Witcel remembers a fellow student who wanted the Pedagogy of Land program to “enter the rhythm of the university.” This student thought the MST was overstepping its authority by organizing the program differently than the rest of the university. Eventually the MST collective decided to ask the student to leave the program. The student decided to enter the normal university routine—which did not include additional studying, collective living, or classes separate from the rest of the student body. Reflecting on the professors’ support of this student’s decision, Elizabete says, “It was then that we realized the university did not understand us or our proposal, because they supported and valued his decision one-hundred percent.”<sup>201</sup> The MST was trying to produce pedagogy graduates who would continue to contribute to the movement, while the university was only trying to produce pedagogy graduates. Despite their progressive history, university faculty valued their “legitimate” knowledge more than the “extra” knowledge activists brought to Ijuí.

One professor reflects on these events, recalling the student who was kicked out of the program: “There is a limit, the university cannot just kick out a student, it is difficult to expel a student. So it was resolved to transfer the student to the regular university pedagogy course. In this sense, the Pedagogy of Land course was very closed.”<sup>202</sup> The MST activists felt the purpose of the program was to push forward the collective struggle for agrarian reform; they were unapologetic about expelling a student who no longer wanted to participate in the collective and political aspects of the program. However, the role of a university as an institution for all citizens

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<sup>199</sup> Interview with Elizabete Witcel, November 15, 2010.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Elizabete Witcel, November 15, 2010.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Professor Paulo Zarth, November 30, 2010.

to access higher education, challenged the MST's political goal. This conflict, between individuality and collective discipline, came to the forefront several times during the four-year duration of this program.

Despite these challenges, the professors overseeing the program continued to support the majority of the MST's initiatives. However, during the last few months an unresolvable conflict developed between the MST and those professors that had been their most adamant supporters. In the late-1990s the Brazilian government began requiring that all private and public universities administer standardized tests to students, to allow for national ranking. The student government at the University of Ijuí was critical of these tests, and went on a campaign asking other students not to take the exam. However, for the professors who went out on a limb to create this first PRONERA program—like Dinarte Belato—the exam was critical for the Pedagogy of Land program to gain national legitimacy. The MST activists debated the issue and made the collective decision that, despite the concerns of the faculty, they should align with the University of Ijuí student government. Instead of telling Belato and others about this decision, the forty-seven activists went to take the test and left all of the exams blank.

The professors in the pedagogy department were outraged, since the exams would appear as though the students had all failed, seriously affect their pedagogy department's national reputation. Belato also admits that he felt personally betrayed by these actions: "They did not allow anyone to know their decision, there was no dialogue!"<sup>203</sup> Another professor expressed similar resentment, saying, "We agreed to work with the practices of the movement, we did what the movement wanted, but the movement refused to work with the practices of the university."<sup>204</sup> These professors critiqued the "discipline and radicalness" of the MST, and activists' lack of compromise. Professor Belato—perhaps the most critical actor in convincing the University of Ijuí to develop this program—was so insulted by these actions that he refused to attend the MST cohort's graduation. The values of the activists had come into conflict with the institutional requirements of the university, even at a progressive university with activist-professors. The MST never returned to develop another PRONERA program at the University of Ijuí.

The first Pedagogy of Land program at the University of Ijuí incorporated many educational practices the MST had developed over the previous two decades, such as the pedagogy of rotation and student self-governance. Activists had to be creative including other aspects of their educational approach within the constraints of the university's institutional structure. The role of PRONERA was simply to fund the program, giving MST activists and professors autonomy to co-administer the program. This process of negotiation brought many challenges, some of which were impossible to overcome. Consequently, the MST leadership became aware that moving into the university sphere would always result in conflict. Activists took the lessons they learned at Ijuí to the subsequent PRONERA programs they developed. A pedagogical accompaniment team—made up of activists who have already passed through a PRONERA program—would be a component of all future courses. This would ensure that MST activists with these previous experiences could help future cohorts navigate the conflicts that would inevitably develop.

### ***Impacts: The First Graduating Class***

In 2002, forty-seven<sup>205</sup> student-activists received their bachelor degrees in pedagogy from the University of Ijuí. I was able to track down and interview twenty graduates from this cohort,

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<sup>203</sup> Roundtable interview at the University of Ijuí, November 30, 2010.

<sup>204</sup> Professor Neyta Oliveira Belato, roundtable interview at the University of Ijuí, November 30, 2010.

<sup>205</sup> Originally fifty-seven people in the program, but ten dropped out of for personal reasons.

while also collecting information about the other twenty-seven students.<sup>206</sup> The graduates from the first Pedagogy of Land cohort are currently living across the country, and although a few of them are no longer active in the movement, the majority of graduates are still MST activists. This speaks to the role certain experiences play in creating an “intense ideological identification” with the values of the movement, which disposes individuals towards future participation (McAdam, 1986). The high percentage of graduates that are still activists—many of whom entered the PRONERA program without a lot of previous involvement in the movement—suggests the positive effects of participation in a program administered by the MST. Table 5.1 illustrates the current occupations of graduates, and their relationship to the MST.<sup>207</sup>

*Table 5.1: Status of University of Ijuí Graduates in 2011*

|                                    |   | <b>Current “Activist Task” or Job</b>                  |  |  |  | <b>Total</b> |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|--------------|
|                                    |   | <i>MST Sector<br/>(education,<br/>formation, etc.)</i> | <i>Teacher/Principal<br/>in MST Settlement<br/>Public School</i> | <i>Teacher/Principal<br/>in Other School</i> | <i>Non-Education<br/>and Non-MST<br/>Job</i> |              |
| <b>Current Connection to t MST</b> | <i>MST State<br/>or National<br/>Leadership</i> | 16 Graduates   | 4 Graduates  |  |  | <b>20</b>    |
|                                    | <i>MST<br/>Activist</i>                         | 2 Graduates  | 9 Graduates  |  | 3 Graduates                                  | <b>14</b>    |
|                                    | <i>No<br/>Connectio<br/>n</i>                   |  | 5 Graduates  | 3 Graduates                                  | 5 Graduates                                  | <b>13</b>    |
| <b>Total</b>                       |   | <b>18</b>  | <b>18</b>  | <b>3</b>                                     | <b>8</b>                                     | <b>46</b>    |

As Table 5.1 illustrates, thirty-four of the Pedagogy of Land graduates—approximately two-thirds of the cohort—are still involved in the MST, either in the national or state leadership, as members of a MST sector (education, formation, gender, etc.), or as teachers and principals working in public schools on MST settlements. Thirteen of these graduates no longer have any relationship with the MST, although five of the thirteen people are still teaching on agrarian reform settlements. Below I analyze statements from several graduates, focusing on how they think their time at Ijuí affected their current activism. These reflections illustrate that PRONERA is important both for the degrees graduates received—which gives them more respect—and for activists’ political formation. This is in contrast to Piven and Cloward’s (1977) thesis, which assumes institutional contact demobilizes activists. In this case, less-involved activists who are drawn to PRONERA because of the prestige of a university degree became dedicated activists.

Almost all of the activists I spoke with commented on the impact the university degree program had on their ability to dialogue as equals with public officials. For example, before becoming an MST activist in the early 1990s, Vanderlúcia Simplicio had only gone through 4<sup>th</sup>

<sup>206</sup> One of the 47 graduates has already died, which is why the table only includes numbers for 46 people.

<sup>207</sup> This reflects the status of graduates in 2011.

grade. After finishing primary and secondary school—through MST adult education programs—she was chosen to attend the PRONERA program at the University of Ijuí. She describes the opportunity to study as a dream; activists in the MST had never thought they would achieve this access to higher education.<sup>208</sup> Shortly afterwards she moved from her home in Ceará to the federal capital of Brasília, to participate in the national MST education sector. She is currently in charge of dialoguing with public officials about the movement’s educational initiatives. She even had the opportunity to meet President Lula in 2010, when he signed the Presidential Decree for *Educação do Campo*. As she shook the President’s hand, she whispered into his ear, “I am a peasant with my bachelor and post-bachelor degrees through PRONERA.” His response—“Good job *companheira*, continue studying!”—is indicative of the respect degrees elicit.<sup>209</sup>

Maria de Jesus dos Santos is another activist from the state of Ceará who graduated from this first PRONERA program. She is now one of the two representatives from her state in the national MST leadership. She also mentions<sup>210</sup> the role these programs have played helping activists to fortify their relationship with public officials. “Before these people did not respect us, but when we all began to graduate, and hold higher education degrees, we could debate them as equals.” Unfortunately, she says, these degrees have also caused divides within the movement. She remembers that the Pedagogy of Land cohort was treated like the “academics of the MST.” She says, “we did not like this, it caused a big debate because yes, we were students, but we wanted to appropriate scientific knowledge to contribute with the MST. We did not want to be considered the intellectuals of the movement.” Maria de Jesus celebrates the respect activists have earned by studying, while also lamenting the hierarchies that university degrees produce.

Another impact of the program was the political formation activists received. As Vanderlúcia says, “We wanted to have our reality in the course, we could not privilege the content of the university and forget our own knowledge and purpose. We were there for political formation.” This political training was especially important for those students who were not yet leaders in the MST, and were more often in the program to learn about school pedagogy. For example, Rosângela do Nascimento was initially critical of those in her cohort who disregarded the importance of learning about school bureaucracy: “You are not able to change the pedagogy of the school if you do not understand the administration of the school, the bureaucratic stuff, and others did not see this as important.” However, as the Pedagogy of Land program progressed it was able to cater to both of these needs. Rosângela says, “I will always be an MST activist, but I am an activist who is preparing to work in the school system. For other activists, they were involved in the national leadership of the movement, they were preparing for other tasks. But this was an important exchange, I think it was important for us and for them.” Despite Rosângela’s goal to work in the schools, she ended up learning about multiple aspects of the MST’s struggle.

Carmen Vedoratto, a teacher in the most southern region of Rio Grande do Sul, had a similar experience. She mentions two aspects of the program that contributed to her personal growth. First, the program helped her reflect on her practice as a teacher. For her final thesis she worked with a collective of small children on her settlement, helping them to do collective artisan work. She interviewed the students about what this manual labor meant to them, and then she analyzed these interviews. It was an important process of reflection for her as an activist-teacher. The second important aspect of the PRONERA program, she says, was how it increased her

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<sup>208</sup> Interview with Vanderlúcia Simplicio, November 9th, 2010.

<sup>209</sup> Informal conversation with Vanderlúcia Simplicio, Fieldnotes, December 2010.

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Maria de Jesus dos Santos, September 5, 2011.

connection to the movement. Since the course had a large number of the MST's leadership participating, there were always MST meetings taking place at the university. The cohort was encouraged to participate, and therefore, Carmen was always aware of internal movement debates. Now, as a teacher in a settlement far from the MST's state headquarters, she realizes that this was a real privilege. She reflects on her current situation, "I am very isolated, sometimes information arrives here, but I feel like the MST keeps walking forward and I am left behind."<sup>211</sup> Thus, rather than demobilizing, PRONERA actively contributes to the MST's ability to engage disparate activists in national discussions about the movement.

Several other graduates also mention the impact of their close contact with the MST leadership during the PRONERA program. Mauriceia Matias Vicente de Lima is currently a MST activist from the state of Pernambuco, but never held a leadership position in her state before entering the program. She remembers<sup>212</sup> that her time at the University of Ijuí was difficult because it was the first university program the movement offered, and therefore, many prominent activists participated. Mauriceia says, "I did not speak much because I was surrounded by the cream of the education sector, the people who had created the MST education sector." As a more recent activist in the MST, Mauriceia felt privileged that the movement chose her to be part of this first cohort. However, Mauriceia admits she was often intimidated: "The leaders had to have pedagogical patience with us, the group with less experience was often scared to talk." Unsurprisingly, the more seasoned activists dominated classroom debates. Regardless, Mauriceia grew politically and says that she felt like she was part of a revolution at the University of Ijuí—"part of the revolution of how we teach our *sem terrinha*." For most graduates, the presence of both MST leaders and less involved activists created a mutually beneficial learning environment.

There were two graduates, however, who left the MST because of conflicts that developed during this program. I arrived at Bernadete Schwaab and Jussara Reolon's school in the center of Rio Grande do Sul by accident. I was interviewing a woman in the state Secretary of Education's office in the city of Passo Fundo, and she asked me if I wanted to visit one of the rural schools she coordinates. To my surprise, I was taken to a settlement famous nationally for MST activism. However, unlike most schools I visit on MST settlements, there were no signs of the movement on or around the school—no MST flags, no socialist quotes on the walls, no pictures of Che Guevara. I soon learned that the principal of the school, Bernadete, had been part of the Pedagogy of Land cohort at the University of Ijuí. At first hesitant to speak with me because she thought "the movement had sent me," Bernadete eventually explained that she had been an activist in the regional education sector, which is why she was chosen to enter the PRONERA program in 1998. Bernadete and Jussara openly admit that they learned a great deal from the Pedagogy of Land program. However, in our conversation they chose to emphasize the conflicts. For example, although they live only an hour from the city of Ijuí they were not allowed to go home on the weekends because they had to do everything collectively. Since students from the Northeast could not go home, they were also not allowed. However, Bernadete says, she had to go home some weekends because she was working for the local Secretary of Education. She says, "I was critiqued and critiqued and critiqued."<sup>213</sup> Bernadete believes that the activists in the program were only concerned about showing the "force" of the MST, they were not concerned

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<sup>211</sup> Interview with Carmen Vedoratto, January 5, 2011.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Mauriceia Matias Vicente de Lima, February 23, 2011.

<sup>213</sup> Conversation with Bernadete Schwaab and Jussara Reolon, December 1, 2010.

with other aspects of the experience—for example, learning how to improve their pedagogy. Bernadete and Jussara kept referring to the “radicalization” of the program. They said they were “tortured” on the weekends, forced to sit through boring lectures on politics. After the course ended, Bernadete and Jussara cut off all contact with the movement.

Bernadete and Jussara continue to teach at the same public school they taught at when they entered the program. In fact, they still incorporate aspects of the MST’s pedagogical proposal into the school, such as group work and community research. However, Bernadete and Jussara try to isolate the school from the more “political” aspects of the movement. For example, at some point after they graduated they took down the MST flag from the school entrance. Bernadete and Jussara do not feel a need to push the “struggle” on students, because “kids need to be kids and play.” They disagree with activists “who talk about socialism at every moment.” They prefer to construct a quality education for students not overshadowed by these political debates.

These two women represent one extreme of the graduates of the Pedagogy of Land course—two of the thirteen students who got their bachelors through the MST’s political maneuvering, but have chosen to leave the movement. It could be argued, however, that Bernadete and Jussara have not left the movement completely behind, as they continue to incorporate aspects of the MST’s practices into their classrooms. Nonetheless, these practices are now de-linked from a larger social movement struggling for political and economic transformation. This is analogous to the use of Freirean “methods” independent of larger struggles for social transformation (Apple, 2013). The other extreme in this cohort are those graduates who entered the program as prominent leaders, and have continued to hold those positions within the movement. These activists used their time at Ijuí to refine the MST’s pedagogical proposal and are currently organizing new university programs for the movement. In contrast to Bernadete and Jussara, these leaders see PRONERA as only important in so far as it strengthens the movement.

Somewhere between these extremes are the activists and teachers in the cohort who were peripherally involved with the MST, and chose to enter the PRONERA program primarily to earn a university degree in pedagogy. For many of these activists, their experiences at Ijuí have led them to take on more prominent leadership roles. For others, they continue to participate in the movement as teachers and principals on settlements. However, the understanding these activists now have of their role as teachers in the movement’s larger struggle is much clearer. These graduates are attempting to implement what they learned in the Pedagogy of Land program into their own schools’ bureaucratic structures. It is not an easy task; they are constrained by daily school practices, paper work, and mundane everyday routines. However, these teacher-activists now know they are part of a larger struggle—an attempt to transform public schools to support agrarian reform. This cohort is acutely aware of the educational experience they are trying to create, because they lived these practices for four years in Ijuí. The degree program at the University of Ijuí impacted PRONERA’s future trajectory in several ways. First, it set the groundwork for dozens of other public universities to develop similar programs over the next decade. This was never inevitable, as all of the universities the MST approached previously had refused to administer such a program. Second, the conflicts that developed during the first program had a lasting effect on the MST’s future relationship to university faculty and state officials, and the type of participation activists believe is necessary to ensure the programs adhere to the movement’s goals. Third and finally, the program had a direct impact on the cohort of activists who participated, with over two-thirds taking on leadership positions in MST education sectors and public schools throughout the country. As Edgar Kolling says, “These formal educational programs are pedagogical laboratories. They are privileged

spaces because in no other space are people together for an extended period of time, discussing and creating theories for the movement.”<sup>214</sup> After participating in this program, many of these graduates went on to develop and oversee similar PROENRA programs in their own states.

### **Bureaucratic Distinctions: Institutionalizing the Ijuí Approach**

The University of Ijuí blazed the way for dozens of other universities—almost all public—to also sponsor university degree programs through PRONERA. Despite the fact Ijuí was neither high ranked nor nationally well known, this initial stamp of approval made professors at other universities more comfortable creating similar programs at their own institutions. As one graduate explains, “other universities decided if Ijuí could do it, then they could do it.”<sup>215</sup> In other words, this first program provided a demonstration effect to professors at other institutions that they would not face repercussions by partnering with the MST. This led to a shift in the funding priority from adult education between 1998 and 2003, to higher education post-2005.

Currently, over forty public universities have sponsored PRONERA bachelor programs, in partnership with MST activists. These degree programs have expanded beyond pedagogy into a range of disciplines, including History, Geography, Social Welfare, Agronomy, Veterinary Studies, Literature, Communications, Journalism, and Law. Between 2003 and 2007, over 14,000 students were enrolled in university degrees programs through partnerships developed between PRONERA, universities, and rural social movements.<sup>216</sup> Table 2 outlines the total number of students enrolled in PRONERA by region between 2003 and 2007 (including adult literacy, high school programs, bachelor and post-bachelor programs). See Appendix B and 2 for the full list of universities and degree programs.

*Table 5.2: Total PRONERA Students Enrolled Per Region, 2003-2007*<sup>217</sup>

|   | South  | Southeast | Central west | Northeast | North  | <b>TOTAL</b>                  |
|---|--------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------|-------------------------------|
| Adult Literacy                              | 11,900 | 40,208    | 37,322       | 142,319   | 77,025 | <b>308,774</b> <sup>218</sup> |
| Technical High School Degree                | 4,363  | 2,658     | 2,703        | 15,159    | 5,412  | <b>30,295</b>                 |
| Bachelor Degree                             | 1,603  | 2,098     | 2,181        | 5,527     | 2,647  | <b>14,056</b>                 |
| Post-Bachelor Specialization <sup>219</sup> | 162    | 103       | 150          | 289       | 110    | <b>804</b>                    |

As Table 5.2 illustrates, there was a massive expansion of PRONERA degree programs between 2003 and 2007: While only 47 activists had graduated from a PRONERA university program in 2002, approximately 14,056 were enrolled in similar degree programs between 2003 and 2007. Thus, the MST has been transformed from a social movement in which the majority of the leadership had never completed college, to a movement in which most regional, state, and

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>215</sup> Interview with Edna Araujo Rossetto, October 21, 2011.

<sup>216</sup> Recently other rural social movements have begun organizing PRONERA degree programs.

<sup>217</sup> These data came from Clarice dos Santos’ presentation at the IV National Seminar for PRONERA in 2010. Very few new courses were developed between 2008 and 2010.

<sup>218</sup> Although the absolute number of students in adult literacy courses is higher than bachelor degree programs, a larger portion of PRONERA’s budget goes to bachelor degree programs.

<sup>219</sup> This includes both courses classified as “specialization” courses and “residency” courses.



national leaders have university and even post-bachelor degrees.<sup>220</sup> This massive expansion is impressive, but even more incredible has been the MST's active participation in the development, implementation, and overseeing of these university programs. This is in contrast to *Educação do Campo* in the Ministry of Education, which had a similar level of expansion post-2006 but within which MST activists have had difficulties continuing to participate.

In this section I analyze the nature of the institution into which the University of Ijuí experiment was institutionalized, and why this has allowed for higher levels of participation. This was not an intentional strategy; PRONERA ended up in INCRA by historical circumstance. However, once PRONERA became part of INCRA three characteristics of this agency affected the program's trajectory: (1) the participatory nature of the agency; (2) the close relationship that exists between bureaucrats and MST activists; and, (3) the agency's process of program implementation, which allows for a *centralized* form of *decentralized* participation.

### ***Participatory Governance by Default***

The MST's relationship to INCRA bureaucrats stands in stark contrast to other state institutions. Wolford's (Wolford, 2010a, 2014) research on INCRA is a critical contribution to this analysis of INCRA's bureaucratic distinction. Wolford argues that both the MST and INCRA depend on each other for survival (Wolford, 2014). Thus, she describes the high levels of civil society participation in INCRA as "participatory governance by default" (2010a). She writes, "it is precisely the weakness and variability of the federal government's commitment to agrarian reform that has provided space for civil society actors to participate in the selection of properties for distribution and beneficiaries as well as in the day-to-day running of life on the settlements" (Wolford, 2010a, p. 94). It is INCRA's *inability* to follow-through on policy goals that allows civil society groups to participate. Consequently, the movement is actively involved in almost every step of the agrarian reform process and MST leaders have become the key interlocutors between the community members in agrarian reform settlements and INCRA bureaucrats (Wolford, 2010a). This argument is similar to other studies of state-society relations, which describe the critical role of activist participation throughout the entire policy implementation process (Abers & Keck, 2009; Hochstetler & Keck, 2007).

Monica Molina, a past director of PRONERA, suggests that this participation is more possible in INCRA than in the MEC because of the physical structure of the federal agencies: the MEC is centralized—its only office is located in Brasília—while INCRA has offices in every state in the Brazil. This allows for local civil society groups to be in direct contact with the INCRA bureaucrats who coordinate the programs.<sup>221</sup> One INCRA official overseeing PRONERA in the city of Petrolina, Pernambuco, says, "Everything depends on the social movements to have these programs pushed through."<sup>222</sup> Another INCRA official in São Paulo explains, "The MST participates in creating the curriculum, in choosing the professors; they have a lot of influence, they organize the seminars, they organize discussions about the movement, the programs are constructed by the MST with the universities." According to these accounts, MST activists are the principle agents developing new PRONERA programs, through university partnerships.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Although I do not have exact numbers of activists with bachelor degrees, over 17 months of fieldwork I met very few MST activists who had not gone through a PRONERA bachelor degree program.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Monica Molina, November 10, 2010.

<sup>222</sup> Interview with Emelia Soares and Maria Brigada, may 12, 2011.

<sup>223</sup> Wolford also confirm high levels of MST participation in PRONERA (Wolford, 2010a, p. 101).

### ***Activist-Bureaucrat Embeddedness***

The relationships that exist between activists and bureaucrats do not only develop at the local governance level. There are also close, personal friendships among national PRONERA coordinators in Brasília and MST activists. Analyzing these state-society relations is critical. Evans (1995) refers to the cohesiveness and connectedness between society actors and government bureaucrats as “embeddedness.” He argues that, “State managers do not engage in disembodied maximization. Their decisions depend on an institutional context composed of complex, historically emergent patterns of interaction that are embodied in social structures and taken for granted by the individuals that work within them. These patterns have a reality that is prior to ‘individual interests’” (Evans, 1995, p. 28). In other words, the personal relationships that exist between government actors and civil society groups directly affect the actions the “state” may take. Drawing on and inverting Evan’s (1995) concept of “embedded autonomy,” Kroger (2011) has argued that the MST’s ability to embed itself in the state—whilst maintaining movement autonomy and promoting contentious actions—has proven effective for achieving goals. Kroger’s study suggests social movement embeddedness in the state has a direct affect on the movement’s ability to participate in defining the outcomes of a policy process.

Both national coordinators of PRONERA since 2003 have been personal allies of the MST, even before becoming directors of the federal program. This is different than the Ministry of Education, where appointed bureaucrats are often supportive of rural social movements, but do not have direct relationships with activists. In fact, as discussed in the previous chapter, the first coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office in the Ministry of Education was chosen precisely because he was *not* directly connected to either the MST or the large rural union confederation, CONTAG. In contrast, Monica Molina, a professor at the University of Brasília and head of PRONERA from 2003 to 2006, played a central role in helping to organize the MST’s first two national conferences on education in 1997 and 1998. She was a professor at the University of Brasília, active in a university-wide working group on agrarian reform, and a participant in the MST’s national education sector meetings in Brasília. When I was in Brasília I stayed with MST activist Vanderlúcia Simplicio, who took me to Monica’s house to interview her. Their friendship was immediately obvious: they gossiped about the new happenings concerning PRONERA and the professors involved in overseeing the programs. Unlike MEC bureaucrats, Monica had deep connections to the MST before becoming the PRONERA director.

Clarice dos Santos, the national PRONERA director since 2007, has a similar relationship to the MST. As Clarice recounts, she worked in the city of Três Passos in Rio Grande do Sul throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, where she became involved in supporting the MST’s struggles. In 1995, the MST even invited her to be part of the MST state education collective. Clarice was also an activist in the PT, and was invited to work for a PT federal congressman in Brasília because of her close relationship to social movement activists. In Brasília, Clarice began working directly with the MST and CONTAG, and helped to coordinate the II National Conference for *Educação do Campo* in 2004. Finally, in 2006, she took a civil service exam and became a civil servant within INCRA. Again, because of her previous embeddedness with the MST, Monica Molina decided to train her as the new PRONERA director.<sup>224</sup>

The connections that exist between MST activists and past and current PRONERA coordinators have helped to ensure high levels of MST participation in the program. Some of the bureaucrats coordinating PRONERA entered these positions precisely because of their previous

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<sup>224</sup> Interview with Clarice dos Santos, November 8, 2010.

relationship to MST activists. In other cases, these friendships developed over time. This mutual support between activists and bureaucrats does not exist throughout the agency; however, it does seem prevalent among PRONERA coordinators. For example, in Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo, and Pernambuco, all of the PRONERA coordinators knew the names of the MST activists in each state's education sector, were aware of the role the MST plays in developing programs, and are generally supportive of this participation.<sup>225</sup> This is partially a consequence of the type of expertise the MST is bringing to PRONERA—knowledge about pedagogies for the countryside, which is not threatening to INCRA bureaucrats who are trained on broader issues of agrarian reform. In the MEC, bureaucrats' claim to educational expertise discourages them from simply accepting wholesale the MST's pedagogical proposals. Both the participatory culture in INCRA and the complementary knowledge of MST activists have facilitated these close relationships.

### ***Centralized Decentralization***

The most critical factor for MST participation is PRONERA's unique form of program implementation, which has ensured a *centralized* process of *decentralized* program development for over a decade. This is in direct contrast to the Ministry of Education (MEC). When first implementing a new *Educação do Campo* program, it is typical for MEC bureaucrats to run a "pilot program," over which social movements have much influence. However, the long-term goal of the MEC is always to devolve the administration of educational programs to state and municipal governments. Devolution is a form of decentralization whereby control over program administration is given in full to other (more local) levels of governance (Faguet, 2012). As Clarice says, "It is not even the MEC that coordinates and takes care of *Educação do Campo* programs, they just give resources . . . they write a "public call" for universities that are interested, and these universities pass through a bureaucratic evaluation, and MEC passes resources to the universities."<sup>226</sup> Once governments and universities have autonomy over these programs, the participation of civil society wanes.

In contrast to the Ministry of Education, INCRA must approve every individual PRONERA program that is funded. In this sense, the process is centralized—every program proposal must pass through the central office in Brasília. However, bureaucrats in Brasília do not develop these proposals; professors in partnership with movement activists are the only ones who can propose a new program. This process becomes a centralized form of decentralization, wherein the centralization of the program approval ensures that program development is decentralized and includes both professors and activists. The fact that every PRONERA proposal comes out of a specific demand from a regional group of MST activists facilitates the participation of these groups throughout the process of implementation. The benefits of combining both central coordination and decentralized participation has been suggested in previous studies of participatory governance (Fung & Wright, 2003; Fung, 2001, 2004). Fung argues that, "practical deliberative democracy requires a grammar and vision that reach beyond the simple antithesis between centralization and decentralization" (Fung, 2001, p. 101). In his study of participatory police beats and local school councils in Chicago, Fung finds that coordinating participation through centralized trainings and workshops is critical to people's ability to participate. Clarice summarizes how this centralized decentralization plays out within INCRA:

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<sup>225</sup> This information is based on interviews with these three coordinators.

<sup>226</sup> Interview with Clarice dos Santos, November 8, 2010.

The fundamental difference in PRONERA is that here, our projects are a permanent demand from below. It is the movements that come together with the universities and present the demands to INCRA. We do not do a public call, we could, but we do not. This fact is that the demand comes from the social movements, from the actual settlements, they take the initiative to propose a course *to* the university; and they are not just proposing a course but also how they are going to oversee that course . . . The students do not go to the university to only go to class, they help construct the educational process. This is an important component of education, subjects of the countryside assuming the agency in the course. And sometimes we have big problems; we do not talk about this process openly.

The direct participation of MST activists in PRONERA is easier than in the MEC, because each proposal comes out of a specific demand from a regional group of activists who also help administer the program they propose. Structurally, PRONERA's process of program development and implementation facilitates the participation of social movement activists. This form of program implementation also guarantees that no PRONERA program ever becomes a permanent degree program within a university; rather, PRONERA has a pre-determined amount of funds each year, and universities have to develop proposals to access to these funds. As Clarice says, "Our process is a direct relationship with civil society. If PRONERA were put in the Ministry of Education, it would die." This is the key point: the MST must remain mobilized locally in order to have the capacity to propose new PRONERA programs.

Finally, I spoke with several of the professors who sponsor PRONERA degree programs at their universities. These professors also admit that while the universities are officially the agents developing PRONERA programs, activists are the ones choosing the professors with whom the movement wants to work.<sup>227</sup> The professors are then charged with convincing their university communities to support these new degree programs. As Professor Bernardo Mançano Fernandes explains, this process is not always easy, especially at a prestigious university like the State University of São Paulo (UNESP). In order to convince UNESP faculty to approve a PRONERA degree program in geography, Fernandes had to meet with all of his colleagues in geography one by one and convince each of them to support the proposal. Even with Bernardo's internal advocacy, the PRONERA geography program was only approved by a one-vote margin. He explains, "It was difficult, in all of Brazil. There are some universities where it is impossible. These PRONERA programs fall within the politics of affirmative action, because they are only for people who have peasant roots. For example, we do not let people from the city enter these programs. Universities want to be open to the entire world, but the MST does not want to be open. The MST wants students who live in peasant territories and are dedicated to the movements." Although many university professors are active supporters of PRONERA, others critique the program. PRONERA's structure of program implementation allows activists to identify sympathetic faculty, who then convince their colleagues to support PRONERA, facilitating the implementation of a controversial program.

Unlike *Educação do Campo* in the Ministry of Education, PRONERA is far from hegemonic within the Brazilian state apparatus. Although there are some government officials, bureaucrats, and university professors that support the program, there are also many officials and civil society groups that are openly critical and contest PRONERA's legitimacy. For example, Armênio Bello Schmidt, the director of the department that oversees the *Educação do Campo* office in the

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<sup>227</sup> Interview with Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, University of São Paulo, UNESP, November 10, 2011. Conversation with Janete Ritter, State University of Western Paraná UNIOESTE, field notes October 2010.

Ministry of Education, believes that PRONERA is an illegitimate education proposal since it is not in the Ministry of Education: “The role of the MEC is to administer education; we have more experience with this than INCRA.”<sup>228</sup> There are also many officials within INCRA who believe education should not be within the agency’s jurisdiction. The recently appointed PRONERA coordinator in São Paulo, Claudia Bueno, explains the two opinions that are dominant within INCRA: One group thinks that there should not be any education program designated for areas of agrarian reform, and instead, people in these areas should take the normal university entrance exams to attend college. The other group believes that PRONERA is a good program, but that the MEC should administer it. Claudi agrees with this latter opinion: “When educational programs are developed outside of the MEC, they are precarious . . . I think this program and the families it is targeting are hurt because the program is not in the MEC.”<sup>229</sup> Clarice says that the only person who thought INCRA should administer the program was the previous PRONERA coordinator, who had been indicated for this by rural social movements.

These comments suggest that although some national and state coordinators of PRONERA are supportive of the program, this opinion is not hegemonic throughout INCRA. This is unsurprising, as Woford (Woford, 2014) has shown that there are multiple bureaucratic perspectives about social movements with INCRA (ranging from deep admiration to outright contempt). PRONERA’s unusual process of program implementation, its location within an agrarian reform agency, and its support of social movement participation, has not yet garnered the consent of the Brazilian population. This lack of support for PRONERA is in contrast to *Educação do Campo* in the MEC, which has become hegemonic—and therefore not often publically contested. Agribusiness groups have even taken on the language of *Educação do Campo*, and are engaging in a Gramscian war of position to include their own interests into these educational programs. In the case of PRONERA, government officials do not dispute the course’s content, but rather, question the legitimacy of the entire program. In 2009, these officials leveled a frontal attack to end the program. Thus, PRONERA represents a *counter-hegemonic* project, wherein mobilization is necessary for the program to continue functioning.

### **Frontal Attacks Against Counter-Hegemony: PRONERA in Jeopardy**

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the entrance of social movements into the university sphere is a process full of conflict and tension. The university is structured around a belief in individual choice and meritocracy, which contradicts the MST’s emphasis on collective decision-making and learning. These differences can produce unresolvable conflicts, such as the student at the University of Ijuí who left the PRONERA program with the support of the university faculty. An analogous conflict occurred at the State University of Mato Grosso in 2008, during the third year of a PRONERA bachelor degree program in agronomy. MST activists had a high degree of participation in developing the agronomy proposal at the State University of Mato Grosso, helping to choose the professors who would teach the classes and publicize the entrance exam to activists on settlements. There was a cohort of sixty students in the program, with representatives from seven states and four different social movements.<sup>230</sup> At

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<sup>228</sup> Interview with Armênio Bello Schmidt, November 10, 2011.

<sup>229</sup> Interview with Cláudia de Arruda Bueno, October 21, 2011.

<sup>230</sup> These included the MST, the Movement of Small Farmers (MPA), the Pastoral of Youth (PJR), and the Pastoral Commission of Land (CPT). This information was displayed on the University’s own web page: <<http://www.novoportal.unemat.br/?pg=noticia/1719/T%EAm%20in%EDcio%20aulas%20do%20curso%20de%20agronomia%20para%20integrantes%20de%20movimentos%20sociais%20do%20campo>>.

the program's opening ceremony, in January of 2006, the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies declared the program to be a "revolutionary space," indicating the awareness among both activists and professors about PRONERA's radical characteristics. The entire educational experience was organized collectively, with small student collectives, a larger coordinating collective, and a pedagogical accompaniment team working together to make all of the decisions about the program. During the program the cohort also engaged the university community in several political events, including a "March for Agroecology and Socio-Economic Solidarity," generating debate among professors and students about agro-ecological initiatives.<sup>231</sup>

### ***Conflicts Peak in Mato Grosso***

Conflicts in the program peaked in 2008, when a student started refusing to participate in the collective organization of the program. The other students thought this was unacceptable. They took the collective decision to expel the student from the program. Clarice dos Santos explains, "This program had a student, a bad student that did not do any of the requirements for the course, and the other students decided they would kick him out. But you cannot just kick someone out of the program. He had taken an entrance exam and had a right to stay."<sup>232</sup> As in Ijuí, there was a tension between the MST's collective orientation and the university emphasis on individualism.

In response to his expulsion, the student wrote a report criticizing INCRA for allowing the MST to administer the program. The Brazilian Federal Court of Audits (TCU) decided to take on the investigation because, if federal money was being given to a private actor such as a social movement, this was a misapplication of the federal budget.<sup>233</sup> One of the nine TCU ministers began investigating the program at Mato Grosso State University. During this investigation more problems developed when the minister discovered the bachelor degree program was called "Agroecology and Socio-economic Solidarity for Social Movements of the Countryside." The reference to social movements—as opposed to students in areas of agrarian reform more generally—was further evidence that activists had an inappropriate role in the program. The TCU issued a scathing report, stating that the program was administered "without a public call or selective process, allowing the professors to be chosen by an organization external to public administration, the MST, in insult to the principles of impartiality and morality."<sup>234</sup>

The TCU concluded that MST activists were personally administering PRONERA programs, and thus, misusing federal funding. A TCU "court judgment" (*acórdão*) was issued, which demanded that PRONERA adhere to a series of new rules. These included the use of contracts, a ban on paying professors, and explicit language prohibiting the participation of social movement activists. Although the TCU ministers did not officially ban the program from continuing to function, these new requirements effectively closed down the program.<sup>235</sup> For example, the requirement to use contracts instead of "institutional agreements"<sup>236</sup> meant that the INCRA

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<sup>231</sup> <<http://www.novoportal.unemat.br/?pg=noticia/1883/%3Cb%3ECome%20E7a%20I%20Jornada%20de%20Agroecologia%20e%20s%F3cio-economia%20solid%20E1ria%20na%20Unemat%3C/b%3E>>.

<sup>232</sup> Interview with Clarice dos Santos, November 8, 2010.

<sup>233</sup> The TCU "audits the accounts of administrators and other persons responsible for federal public funds, assets, and other valuables, as well as the accounts of any person who may cause loss, misapplication, or other irregularities that may cause losses to the federal treasury," (TCU Website).

<sup>234</sup> Acórdão #2653/2008, section b of the report, page 9.

<sup>235</sup> Letter from Gilda Diniz do Santos to the President of INCRA, with the subject "Acórdão TCU 2653/2008," sent on March 26, 2009.

<sup>236</sup> The original Portuguese word I am translating to "institutional agreement" is *convênio*.

bureaucrats no longer controlled which university they would work with. A lawyer for the MST who worked on a TCU case explains: When a government wants to implement a program that requires a third party, it can work through two different mechanisms. The first is a contract, which requires a process of open bidding. For example, if the federal government constructs a new building dozens of companies can bid for this contract and the one with the best offer receives the job. This ensures that those in power do not use contracts as patronage. A second option is for the government to create an institutional agreement with the third party. These institutional agreements are allowed if there is no profit involved and common interest exists between both parties. For educational programs, institutional agreements are common and allow governments to transfer money to educational entities with the common interest of educating a given population. Until 2008, all PRONERA programs were developed through these types of institutional agreements with universities partners. Now INCRA was required to issue an open call for each new educational program and to choose the most “efficient” entity to administer the program, regardless of public or private status. This use of a contract and open bidding for program implementation prohibited the civil society participation that previously characterized PRONERA. Furthermore, activists could no longer identify the educational demands in their communities and develop programs in response to these demands. Instead, INCRA had to define program goals top-down, and open a public bidding process for implementation.<sup>237</sup>

I visited the TCU offices in Brasília in November of 2010, to learn more about the court judgment and the debates over PRONERA’s administration. During this visit I saw visible signs of a different patterning of state-society relationships than I had in INCRA, or even in the Ministry of Education. The formality of the TCU and its staff was immediately obvious: women and men in suit jackets, high levels of security, and professional aids sent to accompany visitors around the building. When I arrived, two aids came to meet me—formally dressed in business suits—and they stayed by my side the entire visit. After being led into an office and offered coffee, I spoke with the two aids about the role of the TCU in Brazil’s bureaucratic state apparatus. They explained that the TCU is an oversight institution that investigates the fraudulent use of federal money; these investigations can start through an internal decision within the TCU, a public denunciation by a Brazilian citizen, or an audit request from Congress.<sup>238</sup> Congress can conduct their own audits as well, they explain, but the TCU’s audits are more reliable since they are “politically neutral.” Unfortunately, although the TCU can help conduct a congressional audit what is done with the report depends on these congressmen, who are influenced by politics. In the case of a public denunciation—such as the PRONERA case—the TCU has more influence as it can issue a court judgment that federal agencies are legally required to follow.

Eventually I was led to the office of Paulo Nogueiro de Medeiros, a head congressional assistant in the TCU. I asked about the history of the PRONERA case, and he quickly explained his perspective: “Everything in the program is outsourced, and when federal programs are outsourced there has to be extra caution to ensure fraud does not happen.”<sup>239</sup> This is why, he continued, outsourcing through contracts is always preferable to institutional agreements, the latter of which involve no accountability or transparency as to which entities are getting federal money. In the case of PRONERA, social movements were choosing which students would participate in the programs. Paulo insists that the TCU did not investigate PRONERA because of

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<sup>237</sup> Interview with Leonardo Kauer, October 25, 2010.

<sup>238</sup> Pre-Interview Fieldnotes at the Brazilian Court of Audits, November 10, 2010.

<sup>239</sup> Interview with Paulo Nogueira de Medeiros, November 10, 2010.

any political reason. The goal of the TCU, he continues, is to simply ensure the proper use of federal money. Both Paulo and the TCU aids were doing what Li (2007) refers to as “rendering technical”—representing situations as problems with technical solutions. For TCU officials, the problem in question was the proper form of outsourcing of federal money, and this issue had a technical solution: ensuring that no federal official could manipulate this outsourcing process. This technical solution, however, did not acknowledge the larger educational goals of PRONERA, which hold the participation of activists as a central part of the learning process.

Unlike Paulo, Clarice dos Santos interprets the banning of PRONERA as an overtly political—not technical—process. She believes that the right wing had been waiting for years to find an excuse to end PRONERA. Once the incident occurred in Mato Grosso, conservative state officials used the TCU investigation to shut down the program. The contractual bidding process appears to be a neutral technical solution, but it makes it completely unfeasible for PRONERA to function. This is because programs always come out of specific community demands, and a principle goal of the program is for these groups to have agency over the development and administration of the programs. What would happen, Clarice asks, if university professors and activists developed a pedagogy program for communities in Pernambuco, but a private educational foundation in São Paulo—that knows nothing about the northeast—won the contract? Clarice believes this would destroy the entire program.<sup>240</sup> Consequently, no new PRONERA programs were approved between 2008 and 2010, while this ban was in effect.

The officials at the TCU actively deny Clarice’s assertion that this is a political issue. For example, I spoke with another lawyer who works for the state-level TCU in Rio Grande do Sul, Jorge José Martuis Junior. Similar to Paulo, Jorge believes that the TCU is a technical, a-political entity. “There are hundreds and hundreds of audits that the TCU does every year, almost thousands. It is not about choice, it is based on a technical need. There are no politics involved in the choice of what is going to be audited. The selection is based on materiality [amount of money], and social relevance. Issues such as education and agrarian reform have more social relevance.”<sup>241</sup> Jorge’s statement “renders technical” (Li, 2007) what others perceive as a political issue.<sup>242</sup> Although many people see the TCU as a conservative body attacking social movements, TCU officials describe the agency as a-political and carrying out a rational oversight process.

### ***MST Counter-Mobilization***

Between 2009 and 2010, MST activists, university supporters, INCRA bureaucrats, and several other rural social movements engaged in a war of movement (Gramsci, 1971) to publically shame and embarrass the TCU into reversing the court judgment. There were two major strategies this coalition employed to pressure the TCU ministers into rescinding their decision: popular mobilization and political navigation. MST activists mobilized hundreds of people throughout the country to support PRONERA through rallies, marches, and building occupations. For example, in June of 2009 there was a large protest in support PRONERA in the capital city of Recife, in the state of Pernambuco. Pamphlets were given out that stated:

PRONERA has been responsible for educating 600,000 youth and adults in settlements . . .  
This program has contributed to the quality of life of people in the countryside and their

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<sup>240</sup> Interview with Clarice dos Santos, November 8, 2010.

<sup>241</sup> Interview with Jorge José Martuis Junior, November 16, 2010.

<sup>242</sup> This is also a form of Ferguson’s (1990) anti-politics machine: the systematic denial of politics in the creation of development problems and solutions.



choice to stay in the countryside. Nonetheless, last year INCRA suspended all new courses and cut 62 percent of PRONERA's budget. We are fighting for reinstating the budget, taking on new partnerships, and regularizing the payment to professors and coordinators. In defense of PRONERA educators, Landless Workers Movement: For School, Land and Dignity!<sup>243</sup>

For two years these types of mobilizations brought activists, students, and supportive professors together in the streets. Provosts of prominent public universities, who had positive experiences with PRONERA programs attended these rallies and declared their support for the program.

The national coalition for PRONERA also developed less contentious strategies, such as letter writing campaigns. One such letter was sent to the TCU on July 13, 2010, and included signatures from a diverse group of civil society groups and government actors from the state of Ceará.<sup>244</sup> The letter outlines the history of PRONERA, and explains that the program was created because of social movement demands and therefore these activists have the right to participate:

The social movements and unions were agents, as legitimate interlocutors of rural workers, in creating this initiative and repairing the historical negation of the right to education in the countryside. Therefore, the participation of these social movements in the identification of demands, in the search for partnerships, and in supporting the construction of the pedagogical process has been essential for the development and success of this program.<sup>245</sup>

The document goes on to critique the TCU court judgment, stating: "The decision to require a bidding process instead of an institutional agreement puts education in the same category as a commodity." Letters such as these, signed by an array of civil society groups and public officials, disputed the TCU's legal justification for the court judgment.

All of these different civil society and government supporters came together in Brasília in November of 2010, for the IV National PRONERA Conference. The attendees included hundreds of students and professors who had participated in PRONERA programs over the previous decade. There were also dozens of MST activists, INCRA officials from every state, representatives from other rural social movements—including CONTAG—and federal and state congressmen. Multiple university presidents were also present at the meeting, as well as the president of INCRA and representatives from the Ministry of Agricultural Development and the Ministry of Education. At the opening ceremony there was a musical and cultural performance—a typical MST practice known as *mística* (mystic)—and a band of young children from a settlement in Ceará played songs about education in the countryside on recycled materials. The refrain of one song said: "I am not going to leave the countryside to be able to go to school. Education of the Countryside is a right and not charity." This refrain encompassed the general sentiment of the conference: the need for more educational programs located in the countryside.

After this musical performance there were statements from each of the civil society groups present, and all of the government officials. The speeches of the politicians emphasized the work

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<sup>243</sup> Pamphlet given to me on June 10, 2009.

<sup>244</sup> These included a representative from the Federation of Small Farmers of Ceará, a professor at the Federal University of Ceará, a representative in PRONERA's National Pedagogical Advisory Board, a professor at the State University of Ceará, a representative from the Ministry of Education's Executive Committee for *Educação do Campo*, an INCRA bureaucrat, a representative from the State Secretary of Education of Ceará, and of course, a member of the MST education sector in Ceará.

<sup>245</sup> Letter to the Presidential Ministry of the Federal Audit Court, Fortaleza, July 13, 2010.

they were doing to advocate for PRONERA. For example, Congressman Valmir Assunção spoke about the meeting government officials were going to have the next day with a TCU minister, and their plan to convince him that PRONERA “contracts” are not possible. Congressman Dionilso Marcon referred to the same meeting, saying, “Tomorrow we are going to try to have a dialogue again, we are going to try to talk to the TCU. They need to understand the amount of learning that is happening in PRONERA and how important it is to work with both universities and social movements.” State congressman Edgar Pretto declared, “My father always said that Agrarian Reform is like *feijoada* (traditional Brazilian bean dish). You can make *feijoada* with only rice and beans, but it is bad . . . similar to agrarian reform without education . . . we have to fight the TCU and other agencies criminalizing social movements.” The presence of these politicians and their meetings with the TCU increased pressure to rescind the court ruling.<sup>246</sup>

The multiple university provosts at the PRONERA conference also increased public pressure. The Provost of the Federal University Goiás spoke about the PRONERA law degree program at his university, which had been critiqued by both the TCU and the Federal Public Ministry as inappropriate for agrarian reform populations. The provost expressed his disagreement with the idea that rural populations only need programs focused on agronomy and pedagogy, as though farmers and teachers are the only professions in the countryside. He said it is also important to train lawyers for the countryside! He mentioned a document fifty-nine provosts signed in support of PRONERA. “These provosts are thinking about the social role of the university . . . The TCU is being absurd, forcing a contract bidding process is ridiculous, it is not possible. Education is not a commodity. The central question is the autonomy of the university.”

These collective efforts culminated on the second day of the conference, November 4, 2010, when President Lula signed a decree supporting *Educação do Campo* and PRONERA.<sup>247</sup> The fact that PRONERA was included in this decree was contentious. Armênio Schmidt, the MEC official working for over a year on the decree, says that at the last minute INCRA bureaucrats convinced the President’s advisors to include PRONERA. Armênio was resentful: “INCRA got a free ride from us, it was the MEC that initiated the process”<sup>248</sup> Clarice dos Santos, on the other hand, says that the MEC had originally solicited the help of INCRA in writing a joint decree. However, when the decree was submitted to the President, PRONERA was not included. This led her to contact the President’s advisors and ensure that it was included, along with an explicit statement about the right social movements have to participate.<sup>249</sup>

The reference to PRONERA and social movement participation in the Presidential decree—not just *Educação do Campo*—gave the program additional legitimacy. However, as the public defender for INCRA explains, the decree does not actually allow INCRA to start implementing any new programs.<sup>250</sup> The decree is only important if it influences the TCU’s decision. Other actions, such as the meeting between congressional representative and the TCU ministers, are equally as important. The President’s signing of this decree in November of 2010 was one of the many political maneuvers that the MST helped organize to force the TCU to rescind its decision.

On December 1, 2010, less than a month after the IV National PRONERA Conference—and more than two years since the TCU first signed the court judgment—the TCU ministers

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<sup>246</sup> Fieldnotes from IV Pronera National Conference, November 2010.

<sup>247</sup> Decreto #7.352, November 4, 2010. Articles 11-17 of the decree are about PROENRA.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with Armênio Bello Schmidt, November 10, 2011.

<sup>249</sup> Interview with Clarice dos Santos, November 8, 2010.

<sup>250</sup> Interview with Gilda Diniz dos Santos, November 9, 2010.

voted to lift many of the restrictions they had put on PRONERA. Most significantly, the requirement for implementing programs through contracts and an open bidding process was repealed. This was a huge victory for PRONERA and the MST. In a public statement from INCRA, Clarice dos Santos attributes this decision to the culmination of public pressure.<sup>251</sup> However, the TCU *did not* rescind the restrictions on social movement participation. To the contrary, the TCU required INCRA bureaucrats to write a new PRONERA manual stating restrictions on social movements' involvement. Currently, the 2012 PRONERA program manual includes clauses that prevent "the assessments of students based on their dedication to social movements," and prohibit "the participation of social movements in the processes of pedagogical accompaniment or evaluation of the programs."<sup>252</sup> Although officials can now implement PRONERA programs through institutional agreements, activist participation is officially illegal.

Regardless of these legal restrictions, post-2010 MST activists have continued to participate in developing, overseeing, and evaluating PRONERA programs. An INCRA official in São Paulo explains: "The MST participates just as much in these programs as before . . . we just have to be more careful, for example, we cannot let the MST decide which students receive the scholarships and which do not."<sup>253</sup> Thus, although there are some limitations, activists are still involved in overseeing the PRONERA programs. Santos expresses a similar sentiment, "In INCRA it is known that social movements always participate in these programs, it is known that this is how it works, but there is no need to shout this fact out to everyone."<sup>254</sup> Since officials coordinating PRONERA are often embedded in the movement—they have developed close connections with activists—they are able to shield this participation from the public purview.

In this section, I analyzed the judicial ruling that paralyzed PRONERA for two years as an example of a frontal attack against counter-hegemony—an attempt to shut down an educational program that was directly supporting the organizational capacity of a controversial social movement. In response to the TCU's attack on PRONERA, MST activists and their university allies engaged in their own war of movement, garnering sufficient political support to force the TCU to rescind the ban. However, "activist participation" in the program is no longer sanctioned. Nonetheless, activists continue to participate in the program, clandestinely. Thus, PRONERA continues to be a counter-hegemonic project—albeit, with more restrictions—supporting the internal capacity and mobilization of a controversial social movement.

## **Conclusions: What Does it Take to Break the Iron Rule?**

Both the *Educação do Campo* programs in the Ministry of Education, and the PRONERA programs implemented through INCRA, came out of the MST's radical educational proposal for the countryside. However, the participation of civil society groups in each of these programs is starkly different. National MST activist Vanderlúcia Simplicio describes this difference:

Sometimes I feel in the Ministry of Education we are just there for to show, we are forced to appear as though we support everything, even though we critiqued some programs . . .

PRONERA was attacked from a different place, PRONERA was attacked because activists

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<sup>251</sup> <<http://www.incra.gov.br/index.php/noticias-sala-de-imprensa/noticias/462-tcu-autoriza-execucao-do-programa-de-educacao-na-reforma-agraria>>, Accessed April 22, 2013.

<sup>252</sup> <[http://www.incra.gov.br/images/phocadownload/servicos/publicacao/manuais\\_e\\_procedimentos/manual\\_de\\_operacoes\\_do\\_pronera\\_2012.pdf](http://www.incra.gov.br/images/phocadownload/servicos/publicacao/manuais_e_procedimentos/manual_de_operacoes_do_pronera_2012.pdf)>, PRONERA Manuel 2012 (p. 19), accessed July 17, 2013.

<sup>253</sup> Interview with Cláudia de Arruda Bueno, October 21, 2011.

<sup>254</sup> Interview with Clarice dos Santos, November 8, 2010.

were truly participating in the creation of these programs. In the Ministry of Education they do not need to attack the program, because social movements are not real participants.

According to Vanderlúcia, the participation of social movement activists in the Ministry of Education is often superficial. Furthermore, because *Educação do Campo* has become hegemonic, the MST no longer has complete control over the content of the programs that are implemented. As the hegemonic educational policy for rural education in Brazil, *Educação do Campo* is not in jeopardy of disappearing; there are currently no frontal attacks on the program. However, an ideological struggle is taking place between diverse civil society groups and government officials, who all have different visions of what *Educação do Campo* should encompass. This suggests that when social movement goals are institutionalized *and* hegemonic, they become part of the “ambiguous, contradictory, and multifaceted” (Santucci, 2010, p. 139) common sense of civil society. This represents both the culmination of the MST’s successful war of position, which Gramsci (2000) says once won “is decisive definitively” (p. 230), and a form of passive revolution.<sup>255</sup> However, once a war of position is won, the struggle shifts to disputing the meaning and content of this new hegemonic common sense.

In contrast, the PRONERA programs implemented through INCRA over the past decade have retained their radical origins, and the MST continues to be the primary actor overseeing these programs. As Vanderlúcia argues, PRONERA was attacked for precisely this reason, because the program represented a counterhegemonic educational alternative in the countryside that supports an alternative form of production. In order to maintain this program after a frontal attack, activists, professors, and students had to mobilize national support. Even then, reopening the program took more than two years. In addition to staying mobilized the MST has had to create a national structure to sustain the movement’s capacity to oversee these university programs, which have given over 14,000 students, most of whom are from MST communities, access to college education. However, this new structure did not simply devolve into the iron rule of oligarchy (Michels, 1915), in which formal organization is antithetical to the use of confrontational goals. To the contrary, MST activists have been able to maintain the radical components of their educational proposal *through* their internal organization.

This analysis suggests that when social movement goals become *institutionalized* but do not become *hegemonic*, direct mobilizations are necessary to maintain these programs. This not only contests the argument that social movements engaging in the institutional realm are always co-opted, demobilized, or destined to waste time and energy pursuing less radical goals (Piven & Cloward, 1977), but it also provides a theory for *how* such co-optation can be avoided. It is PRONERA’s combination of institutionalization and its non-hegemonic status that forces the MST to stay mobilized and results in the program adhering to the movement’s original goals.

In order to analyze the trajectory of social movement outcomes in state institutions, I argue that it is necessary to analyze the nature of the *historical conjuncture* within which goals are implemented, the *state-society relations* that develop through program implementation, and the *degree of hegemony* social movement goals achieve within the government and among civil society groups. Following from this, I argue that three factors have helped to ensure the MST’s relative control over PRONERA over the past fifteen years: (1) the historical moment in which PRONERA was first created, which forced the program into INCRA and ensured that the MST would have a privileged role in the program’s development; (2) the first degree program at the

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<sup>255</sup> Passive revolution refers to “one of the convoluted, and sometimes unintended, ways by which the dominant sectors establish willing consent (‘hegemony’) for their rule” (Tugal, 2009a, pp. 3–4).

University of Ijuí, which illustrated the conflicts inherent in a social movement's entrance into the university sphere and influenced future activist-professor-bureaucrat relations; and, (3) the nature of INCRA, most importantly its participatory culture, the embedded bureaucrat-activist relations, and the centralized process of decentralized program development.

There are several additional conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis in this chapter. First, I have shown that the nature of the “institutions” into which social movement demands become “institutionalized” needs to be a new focus of discussion. Wolford's (2010a, 2014) extensive studies of INCRA have shown how this federal agency is distinct within the schema of the Brazilian bureaucratic-state apparatus. In comparison to the Ministry of Education—a robust, technocratic, top-down, well resourced, and hierarchical institution—INCRA has a participatory institutional culture with a process of program implementation that ensures civil society groups are active in every aspect of the agency. The MST's ability to maintain high degrees of participation during the period of PRONERA's program expansion between 2003 and 2007 was contingent on the nature of this institution. This is why it is necessary to not only analyze social movements and their political environment, but also the nature of institutions that movements are contesting. While Voss and Sherman (2000) argue for the need to reassess movement bureaucratization over time, I advocate for a focus on different state-society relations at any single historical moment, and how these differences affect institutional outcomes.

Second, the case of PRONERA illustrates that activist involvement in state institutions can facilitate mobilization over time. Between 2003 and 2007, PRONERA funded adult literacy programs for 300,000 students, technical high school degree programs for 30,000 students, university-level degree programs for 14,000 students, and post-bachelor specialization degrees for 800 students. Although not all of these students were MST activists—nor have all of the MST activists that graduated from these programs stayed in the movement—my data suggests that an exceptionally high proportion of graduates from PRONERA programs remain activists. This is because, as Edgar Kolling says, PRONERA programs are privileged spaces where the state funds the MST's ability to bring activists together from across the country to strategize about the movement.<sup>256</sup> Activists in these PRONERA programs meet weekly to discuss the movement's internal affairs.<sup>257</sup> In addition, PRONERA gives stipends to students, which eases the movement's financial burden to fund their own activists. Finally, as national MST leader Maria de Jesus dos Santos emphasizes,<sup>258</sup> the technical skills that activists learn become critical to the development of the settlements themselves. “Now we have pedagogues, agronomists, lawyers, journalists, all of these professions in the countryside that are important for the working class.” The mere quantity of MST activists who now have college degrees and continue to participate in the movement indicates PRONERA's role in sustaining the movement over time.

Third and finally, this chapter suggests that radical educational projects—within a capitalist state—might be destined to remain counter-hegemonic experiments. Unlike the movement for *Educação do Campo*, which succeeded in becoming common sense for a diverse group of progressive and conservative public officials and civil society groups, PRONERA never garnered this type of multi-class support. It continues to be marginalized within the Brazilian state-bureaucratic apparatus, and contested by both state actors and powerful business lobbies. The continued strength and MST mobilization will be necessary for the PRONERA to continue.

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<sup>256</sup> Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

<sup>257</sup> I personally observed these meetings at a PRONERA post-bachelor program in Family and Peasant Agriculture, which took place at the Federal University of Santa Maria. Field Notes, November 2010.

<sup>258</sup> Interview with Maria de Jesus dos Santos, September 5, 2011.

### PART III: ENGAGING THE DECENTRALIZED STATE

*It is not the school that changes, it is the pace of the community that takes the school with it.*  
-Salette Campigotto<sup>259</sup>

The MST offers a unique empirical terrain of intersection for those interested in both social movement contestation and civil society participation. It is a hybrid case with a hybrid agenda, a movement fighting for a socialist hegemony in the countryside, and the allegiance of landless families for this political project, while also participating in the delivery of public goods. Although most of the literature on coproduction and participation (outlined in Chapter 2) assumes a common goal such as the provision of urban infrastructure between states and civil society actors, the MST is a case of activists promoting a particular political vision for the countryside (collective small farming), which is in conflict with the position of many state officials (for agribusiness). At the same time, the literature on contestation and mobilization assumes contradictory interests, but does not allow for the possibility that even with conflict activists may become legitimate actors within public institutions.

As Part II illustrated, over the past two decades the MST has been able to create various educational institutions that are independent of the public school system, but have gotten legal government recognition. The MST's first "movement school," the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC), has been offering alternative high school courses to MST activists since 1995. Three years later PRONERA was created by the federal government, allowing the movement to partner with dozens of universities to provide families in areas of agrarian reform access to higher education. The National School of Florestan Fernandes, founded in 2005 in São Paulo, is not only the location for MST national leadership meetings, but also the space for extended political courses that social movement activists across Latin America attend. In these unique educational spaces the MST has a very high level of control over the curriculum and the pedagogical experiences of the student-activists.

The focus of Part III of this dissertation is not on the MST's "movement schools" or the various educational programs developed at the federal level, but on the *public schools* located on MST settlements and, less often, encampments. Despite the federal laws that support *Educação do Campo* in the Ministry of Education, the devolution of K-12 public schooling to municipal and state governments has produced drastically different educational outcomes. Municipal and state schools are administered autonomously—even when physically located on the same street—through independent administrative bureaucracies. Therefore, the following comparison between municipal and state school systems is appropriate because the level of analysis, an administrative unit, is the same. Currently there are both state-run and municipal-run public schools functioning in a loosely defined "regime of collaboration" throughout the country.

The MST's first struggle is always for the construction of a school within an MST settlement, and activists often put pressure on both municipal and state governments, until one of these government levels agrees to build a new public school linked to its bureaucratic apparatus. Thus, in some states like Rio Grande do Sul the majority of public schools on MST settlements are state schools, while in Pernambuco schools located on MST settlements are generally run by dozens of different municipal governments. In contrast to the MST's "movement schools," like

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<sup>259</sup> Interview with Salette Campigotto, January 13, 2011.

IEJC, control over public schools is never given wholesale to the movement. Here, activists must negotiate, protest, and mobilize to participate.

Despite regional differences in the MST’s organizational structure and local struggles for agrarian reform, the MST education collectives that are currently active across the Brazil can be described as fighting for similar educational outcomes, outlined extensively in Chapter 3. First and foremost, MST education collectives fight for schools located in rural communities, with curriculum that values life in the countryside. This includes a holistic approach to learning that moves beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries to foster learning based on thematic topics relevant to rural areas. The curricular approach also incorporates manual labor as well as intellectual labor into the school day. The MST collectives fight to incorporate agro-ecological learning in the curriculum, while also promoting collective work practices. Additionally, and most polemically, MST activists want schools that inspire students to participate in the movement, which means studying the history of agrarian reform and helping students identify with the movement through daily practices such as singing the MST national anthem, practicing call and response protest chants, and singing MST songs.

In terms of the organization of the school system, the MST envisions schools as spaces of non-hierarchical democratic governance, where parents, teachers, and students make collective decisions about how their schools should function. In order to implement this proposal, local MST activists must convince their communities—and the tenured teachers already working in their schools—to engage in a participatory process of defining educational goals. This generally occurs through large assemblies, in which parents, students, teachers, school principals, and other community representatives discuss their vision for education. Often, MST activists get permission to allow local communities to rewrite their school’s “Political-Pedagogical Proposal” (school mission statement). While distant bureaucrats are usually charged with creating this document, with the MST’s leadership the writing of this school mission statement becomes a lively debate about educational purpose.

While MST activists have general goals they are advocating for in these communities—which they often learn externally through their participation in MST-administered courses and seminars—part of the movement’s educational proposal is adapting these goals to each local context. For example, in some communities, the first intervention of MST educational activists is to create collectives of principals, teachers and students, while in other areas the initial step is rewriting the curriculum, or starting a school garden. As members of these communities, local MST activists try to convince parents, teachers and students about the value of the movement’s approach to education, while also leaving space for the community itself to define the exact goals for their school through a participatory and deliberative process.

I refer to the different levels of success that MST activists have implementing their educational goals as “degrees of MST-State coproduction.” Table PIII.1 represents the indicators I have created for these different degrees of MST-state coproduction across the country.

*Table PIII.1: Degrees of MST-State Coproduction of Rural Public Schools*

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>Marginal</b> | <i>Presence of a school</i> located in a settlement or encampment; sporadic visits by local MST activists (financial support for schools varies).     |
| <b>Basic</b>    | <i>MST teacher-trainings</i> offered to teachers, funded by the state or municipal government and organized by local MST education collectives.       |
| <b>Partial</b>  | <i>MST movement identity</i> incorporated into the school through the presence of an MST flag, MST anthem, protest chants, celebration of MST events. |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Significant</b> | <i>Organizational re-structuring of the school</i> through the creation of teacher and student collectives, student-led discipline teams, community involvement.              |
| <b>Full</b>        | <i>New curriculum and interdisciplinary content</i> developed with MST activists; e.g. incorporation of political issues, agro-ecology, research projects on local realities. |

As Table PIII.1 indicates, a marginal degree coproduction—the presence of a school located in a MST settlement or an encampment—is the easiest type of MST-state coproduction that activists can win. Furthermore, without the presence of a public school in an MST community, high degrees of MST-state coproduction are impossible. My description of basic, partial, significant, and full coproduction is based on a systematic assessment of more than 40 public schools in MST communities in Brazil, and an analysis of the types of MST initiatives that are most common. As noted in Table PIII.1, holding occasional teacher trainings for municipal and state teachers is one of the first actions MST activists take. This then leads to other initiatives, such as the incorporation of the MST’s identity into the school and different types of organizational re-structuring. The development of new curriculum and interdisciplinary content, what I define as full MST-state coproduction, is one of the hardest initiatives to achieve in the state and municipal public school systems.

### **Factors Shaping Regional Variation in MST-State Coproduction**

In Chapter 2, I discussed the competing explanations among state-society theorists for why coproduction develops. I argue that there are three factors that are important in analyzing MST-state coproduction of public schooling: government orientation, state capacity, and levels of mobilization, which includes both internal and external mobilization.

For many state-society scholars, “government orientation” simply means committed officials who are not necessarily ideologically left-leaning, but are state actors who are dedicated to implementing a participatory process with civil society (Baiocchi, 2005; Coelho, 2007; Goldfrank, 2011a). However, in the case of the MST, levels of “commitment” often fall along ideological lines. Therefore, for the case studies I explore in the next two chapters I describe this external factor as the *state’s orientation towards the MST*. I argue that supportive, tolerant, and even clientelistic orientations towards the MST allow for MST-state coproduction to develop.

High levels of state capacity—defined as a bureaucratic apparatus with sufficient resources, autonomy, and accumulation of expertise to implement intended policy goals (Skocpol, 1985)—has long been held as a critical component of participatory democracy (Baiocchi et al., 2008; Evans, 1997; Ostrom, 1996). However, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, there is also a group of scholars that argue that strong bureaucratic institutions are not necessary for participatory governance to develop (Joshi & Moore, 2004), but rather, social movement’s can often *mobilize* the state’s capacity to act (Abers & Keck, 2009; Hochstetler & Keck, 2007). In a similar line of argument, Wolford (2010a) argues that weak institutions often allow civil society participation to happen by default. The following case studies complicate this debate, illustrating that MST participation in public schools can develop in *both* low-capacity and high-capacity contexts. However, as my data suggests, it is the relationship *between* state capacity, state-orientation, and MST mobilization that influences outcomes in MST-state coproduction.

This brings us to the third factor that both social movement and state scholars discuss: civil society mobilization. State-society scholars argue that a self-organized and mobilized civil society (Baiocchi et al., 2008; Coelho, 2007; Evans, 1997; Keck, 1992) is critical to participatory governance. However, they often focus on how this mobilization is driven by the state. Social



movement scholars, on the other hand, offer a range of concepts to analyze why mobilization might emerge. Neither of these bodies of literature focuses explicitly on internal social movement mobilization, or what I refer to as the relationship between the leadership of a movement and its base.

Although MST activists represent themselves as a united movement nationally and internationally, MST leaders' ability to garner the consent of peasant communities varies regionally, often due to distinct agrarian histories (Wolford, 2010b, p. 10). In Chapter 2, I suggest that the one million people the MST leadership claims to be part of their "movement" is better understood as the "civil society" in areas of agrarian reform—the range of associations, organizations, and every day practices taking place in agrarian reform settlements and camps. In contrast, the national, state, and regional leadership of the MST is similar to a Gramscian political party, or what Tugal (2009b) has defined as political society. I refer to the ability for this "MST political society" to maintain the moral and intellectual leadership over civil society groups living in areas of agrarian reform as the *degree of MST mobilization in civil society*. These degrees of internal mobilization are directly connected to levels of external MST mobilization (moments when the MST shows its force). Thus, the third factor I analyze in these cases—degrees of MST mobilization in civil society—refers to both the MST's external mobilization (showing its force) and its internal mobilization (leadership-base relations). Table PIII.2 illustrates the variation between cases, in an attempt to assist the reader in identifying these processes in the following cases

*Table PIII.2: Regional Variation in MST-State Coproduction of Public Schools, 1995-2011*

|                     |   | <b>Orientation of state actors towards MST</b> | <b>State capacity</b> | <b>Significant degree of MST mobilization in civil society?</b> | <b>Level of MST-state coproduction of public schools</b> |
|---------------------|---|--|-----------------------|---|--|
| <b>SUCCESSFUL</b>   | <b>Rio Grande do Sul</b> (1996 to 2006) | Tolerant to Supportive                         | High                  | Yes   | <i>Full Coproduction</i>                                 |
|                     | <b>Ceará</b> (2009 to 2012)             | Supportive                                     | High*                 | Yes   | <i>Full Coproduction</i>                                 |
|                     | <b>Santa Maria da Boa Vista, PE</b>     | Clientelistic                                  | Low                   | Yes   | <i>Significant Coproduction</i>                          |
| <b>UNSUCCESSFUL</b> | <b>Rio Grande do Sul</b> (2007 to 2010) | Antagonistic                                   | High                  | Yes   | <i>No to Basic Coproduction</i>                          |
|                     | <b>Rio Grande do Sul</b> (2011 to 2012) | Supportive                                     | High                  | No  | <i>No to Basic Coproduction</i>                          |
|                     | <b>Sao Paulo</b>                        | Antagonistic                                   | High                  | Yes   | <i>Basic Coproduction</i>                                |
|                     | <b>Água Preta, PE</b>                   | Clientelistic                                  | Low                   | No  | <i>Basic Coproduction</i>                                |
|                     | <b>Ceará</b> (2003 to 2008)**           | Tolerant to Supportive                         | Low                   | Yes   | <i>No Coproduction</i>                                   |

*\*This High State Capacity was a result of a partnership with the federal government.*

*\*\*This is the only unsuccessful case discussed in Chapter 6, not Chapter 7.*

Although my research is based on five public school systems, Table PIII.2 has eight cases because I have split Rio Grande do Sul into three different case study periods and Ceará into two case study periods. Together, these eight case study periods shed light on the sets of social conditions that shape the MST's ability to transform rural schools throughout Brazil.

### **Federal Influences on Regional Cases**

Finally, beyond the factors listed in Table PIII.2, there is one additional actor influencing the MST's ability to transform rural public schools across Brazil: the federal government. Although state and municipal governments are autonomous with respect to the administration of the public school systems, the federal government attempts to influence these subnational governments through various mechanisms, including conditional funding, partnering with subnational governments to develop new programs, informational conferences, and initiating committees at the state and municipal levels.

As Chapter 4 outlines, the federal government first began to embrace *Educação do Campo* during the administration of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, when a national law was passed in support of this educational perspective. However, the federal government only began implementing *Educação do Campo* when President Lula took office and created a Department of Education for Diversity and Citizenship. Within this department there was an *Educação do Campo* office, which was advised by a "Permanent Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo*." This advisory board included a number of university representatives, government officials, and civil society groups, including the MST. Through this office a series of programs were developed, including the Bachelor Degree in *Educação do Campo* (LEDOC), the Escola Ativa program, and an adult education program *Saberes da Terra* (Knowledges of Land).<sup>260</sup>

In addition to these programs, the latter two of which required partnerships with state and municipal governments, the Ministry of Education hosted twenty-five state seminars for *Educação do Campo* across Brazil. As Armênio Schmidt, the previous head of the Department of Education for Diversity and Citizenship, explains,<sup>261</sup> "For a long time *Educação do Campo* was only being discussed by the social movements, in the states and municipalities no one thought like this. I know because I was a secretary of education for a municipality, but I did not think in terms of the countryside." To help states and municipalities embrace the goals of *Educação do Campo*, the Ministry of Education partnered with every state in the country to host these seminars. The only state where a seminar for *Educação do Campo* did not take place was in São Paulo, where the state government refused to host the seminar, as explained in Chapter 7.

It was Antonio Munarim, the first head of the *Educação do Campo* office, who was put in charge of organizing these state seminars, which took place between 2005 and 2006. In every seminar there were representatives from state and municipal secretaries of education, members of rural social movements such as the MST, state rural labor federations (affiliated with CONTAG), indigenous organizations, NGOs, *quilombola* communities, university professors, and government representatives. Professor Munarim says that these meetings were often intense, as Secretaries of Education from conservative political parties had never been put into the same room as MST activists.<sup>262</sup> Several meetings resulted in intense fighting, with government actors

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<sup>260</sup> The first two of these three programs were discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Armênio Bello Schmidt, November 10, 2010.

<sup>262</sup> Interview with Antonio Munarim, November 28, 2011.

storming out of the meeting early. However, in some places these committees succeeded in shifting institutional relationships between civil society organizations and state governments.

The principal goal for each of these seminars was to create a “State Committee for *Educação do Campo*,” which would be institutionally linked to the State Secretary of Education and include participants from members of rural social movements, NGOs, universities, and government agencies (similar to the Advisory Board in the MEC). However, while some of these committees took on a life of their own at the state-level—such as occurred in Pernambuco<sup>263</sup> and Pará—in other states these committees fell apart within the year. In November of 2011, when I interviewed Antonio Munarim, he estimated that approximately 15 state committees were still functioning. These committees continue to vary widely in terms of who is driving the agenda, with civil society playing a large role in some states, and government officials or university professors controlling the process in others.

Although not all state seminars were equally successful, in general these seminars increased the knowledge and awareness among municipal and state secretaries of education and civil society groups about the goals of *Educação do Campo*. While in some states such as Rio Grande do Sul these committees were founded well-after the MST had already started implementing their educational proposal at the state level, in other states like Ceará the seminars initiated this educational struggle. The trajectory of these state seminars and the committees that formed in their aftermath is another critical component for understanding the MST’s differential success influencing state and municipal public schools across Brazil.

## **Roadmap for Chapters 6 and 7**

The following two chapters will discuss in detail the MST’s attempt to transform three state and two municipal public school systems. As this introduction has emphasized, the MST offers a unique opportunity to examine a social movement that is both contesting the state and trying to participate within state institutions—and activists’ relative success across regions. In Chapter 6, I analyze the three cases where significant to full coproduction of public schooling develops. First I discuss the case of Rio Grande do Sul, between 1996 and 2006, as one of the first and ideal examples of the MST’s successful transformation of state public schooling. Then I explore the state of Ceará, briefly analyzing why coproduction was impeded from 1996 to 2008, but focusing on the reasons why full MST-state coproduction of state public schooling developed between 2009 and 2012. Finally, I discuss the case of Santa Maria da Boa Vista, a municipality in the far western part of the state of Pernambuco, and why a significant degree of coproduction began developing in the late 1990s and has continued over multiple political administrations. In each of these three cases I discuss the nature of the state and municipal political contexts, the factors that facilitated MST-state coproduction, the strategies that MST activists utilized to engage the state, and the influence of federal-level initiatives.

In Chapter 7, I explore three cases where MST-state coproduction was impeded and the MST has not been able to implement their educational ideas. First I analyze the state of São Paulo and the reasons why the MST never developed a relationship with the state government, despite multiple attempts and dozens of well-funded schools located in their rural settlements (basic MST-state coproduction). A critical factor in this state is the government’s ability to ignore federal trends, and even refuse to host a state seminar for *Educação do Campo*. Second, I

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<sup>263</sup> While doing research in Pernambuco in 2011, I participated in four meetings of the Pernambuco State Committee for *Educação do Campo*.

examine the case of Rio Grande do Sul between 2007 and 2011. I split this case study into two periods, the first being a moment when an antagonistic and high-capacity state ended all of the MST's previous educational experiments, and a second period when there was a supportive government but the MST was demobilized. Finally, I explore the case of Água Preta, in the state of Pernambuco, arguing that this municipality has a very similar political context to that of Santa Maria da Boa Vista. Nonetheless, because the MST lost its relationship to its base (it no longer had moral or intellectual leadership), it was *the civil society groups in these areas of agrarian reform that impeded coproduction*. Together, Chapters 6 and 7 offer important insights into how a contentious social movement attempts to develop a participatory relationship with local governments, and the many catalysts and barriers to this process.

## Chapter 6: Educational Transformation in Practice: Regional Cases of Successful MST-State Coproduction

### Rio Grande do Sul: Partisan Ideology and Social Movement Repertoires

Rio Grande do Sul is located on the far southern part of the country bordering Uruguay. The state has the fifth highest population in Brazil with a population of 10.7 million people, 85 percent of whom are urban residents (IBGE, 2011). It is also the fourth richest state in Brazil, contributing 6.6 percent of the GDP in 2008, with strong agricultural and industrial sectors (IBGE, 2011). Due to massive Italian, German, and Polish immigration into this region during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population is much more European-descendent than the rest of the country, especially in rural areas. Residents of the state are known as *gauchos*, or cowboys, due to this long history of small farming and cattle ranching in the region.

Ever since the late-1970s, Rio Grande do Sul has been a stronghold for left-leaning politics. This political organizing was initially pushed through the progressive wing of the Catholic Church and priests adhering to liberation theology (discussed in Chapter 3). In 1980 the Workers Party (PT) was founded and by 1988 Olívio Dutra, a union activist and PT party member, was elected mayor of the state's capital, Porto Alegre. Although Dutra left office after one term, the PT was able to stay in power for 16 consecutive years. The city of Porto Alegre became famous internationally for the participatory budgeting system that Dutra first implemented as mayor in 1989 (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2005), which has continued to function through the current period. This participatory budgeting system won a "best practice" award in urban governance from the United Nations in 1996 (Goldfrank 2011a: 36).

Outside of the state capital, Rio Grande do Sul also has a long history of rural mobilization, especially through the work of the Pastoral Commission of Land (CPT), the oppositional union movement (Central Union of Workers, or CUT), and the MST. It was in this state that the first land occupations leading to the formation of the MST began to take place in the late 1970s and early 1980s, inspired by priests in the CPT. In many rural regions of Rio Grande do Sul there is still significant overlap between activists in the CPT, CUT, MST, and the PT. This has blurred the line between movements and political parties, as activists in all of these movements have historically supported the PT, sometimes becoming PT candidates themselves. The story of Rio Grande do Sul between 1996 and 2006 represents an ideal case of MST participation in public education, in which movement activists are able to implement their educational proposals in public schools on camps and settlements with ample state support.

#### *A Tolerant Government: Antônio Britto and the PMDB (1995-1998)*

In Rio Grande do Sul, the first moment of public<sup>264</sup> MST-state coproduction began during the government of Antônio Britto of the center-right Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), in power from 1995-1998. During this period, in the mid-1990s, MST mobilization was at a peak in the state as activists organized dozens of new land occupations, with hundreds of families participating. These land occupations galvanized the movement, increasing its

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<sup>264</sup> Although this is the first moment of public (open) coproduction, MST activists had been active in state public schools clandestinely since 1982, when Salete Campigotto was first appointed as the official teacher of a state public school in the settlement Nova Ronda Alta (see Chapter 3)

organizational capacity. Furthermore, the agricultural cooperatives located on agrarian reform settlements that had been established in the mid- to late-1980s were much more viable than in other states, allowing for a flow of money into the movement regionally. In this context, MST activists showed their strength by organizing protests, occupying buildings, and holding marches.

One of the consequences of these dozens of MST land occupations was that hundreds of children living in these MST camps were out of school because transportation was difficult and families were constantly forced to relocate due to police eviction. To address these concerns, the MST state education collective developed a proposal for what became known as “Itinerant Schools”<sup>265</sup>—state-administered public schools located within MST camps that could travel with the camps through their various transitions. As MST activist Elizabete Witcel explains, “We began to discuss the idea of the school of the encampment, that the school should be where the kids are, or in other words, the school should be in movement with the movement of the parents and the struggle for land.”<sup>266</sup> Another MST activist who was involved in developing this proposal, Marli Zimmerman, emphasizes that there were already dozens of informal educational activities taking place on these camps, and this educational proposal developed from these experiences.<sup>267</sup> In addition, MST educational activists began to read texts from the Cuban philosopher Jose Martí, who became an inspiration. As Elizabete explains, once the MST solidified the idea of a school within their camps, “we decided to bring the proposal to the Secretary of Education.”

Perhaps the phrase “we brought” is an understatement. In 1995 the MST organized a statewide march to the capital, involving hundreds of children who were living in camps. Once at the capital, these children rallied outside of the state Secretary of Education—while studying the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of Children—demanding educational access in their camps. A few months later, Governor Britto agreed to construct state public schools on MST camps—what became known as “Itinerant Schools—as a two-year “pedagogical experiment.”

Why did a center-right government decide to support the movement’s coproduction of *legal* state public schools on *illegal* MST encampments? A big factor was undoubtedly the high levels of MST mobilization across the state, and the increasing political pressure the movement was putting on the government to provide an educational alternative for the children living in MST camps. For example, the children’s protest in front of the Secretary of Education was only one of dozens of protests that activists in Rio Grande do Sul organized to support this educational proposal. However, in addition to these traditional social movement repertoires, another critical factor was the advocacy of Sister Alda Moura, a progressive nun and an educational bureaucrat inside of the Britto administration. As Elizabete explains, “The person who helped write this proposal in the Secretary of Education was Sister Alda, she did the internal maneuvering within the Secretary of Education because she supported the proposal.”

As Sister Alda herself explains, she ended up in the Secretary of Education under the Britto administration almost by accident. She had been a teacher previously, but was also very connected to social movements such as the MST through her work with popular education in her local church. One weekend in 1995 she was travelling and ran into an old friend who was working in the Secretary of Education. They began talking, and the woman told Sister Alda that they really needed someone in their office who could dialogue with the social movements,

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<sup>265</sup> For an extensive discussion on the Itinerant Schools, see Isabel Camini, *Escola Itinerante: na Fronteira de uma Nova Escola* (São Paulo: Editora Expressão Popular, 2009).

<sup>266</sup> All quotes from Elizabete Witcel, unless noted, came from an interview on November 15, 2010.

<sup>267</sup> All quotes from Marli Zimmerman, unless noted, came from an interview on November 21, 2010.

because there had been a lot of conflicts between Governor Britto and these movements. This friend facilitated Sister Alda's appointment in the secretary of education, as the bureaucratic officially responsible for being a liaison with social movements.

As soon as Sister Alda entered the Secretary of Education, a collective of MST activists came to speak with her and invited her to a gathering of landless children (*sem terra*). During this gathering, Sister Alda listened to the children's concerns about their lack of educational access, the discrimination they faced in the local public schools, and their desire to have schools in their own camps. A few months later, the MST occupation of the Secretary of Education took place. However, Sister Alda had already known about this occupation for weeks:

I left a meeting at noon, knowing that the occupation would happen. I was very anxious about what was going to occur. At this point the government was afraid of the MST, and when the MST arrived at 2:00 I was called out to the front to talk to the activists. There were lots of policeman and big cords preventing the entrance of the children. I told the Secretary of Education that she should ask a delegation of MST activist to meet with her. I told her that, but this was already the plan I had made with the MST.<sup>268</sup>

The MST delegation met with the Secretary of Education. It was decided at this meeting that the movement would have 15 days to write a proposal for constructing schools in MST camps, but that this proposal had to be approved by the State Education Advisory Board.<sup>269</sup>

The MST chose three people from their education collective to create this proposal, in coordination with Sister Alda and another official from the Secretary of Education. Sister Alda describes this process as intense, as she had to dialogue with dozens of people in the Secretary of Education in order to help the MST create a proposal that would be supported by the Britto administration. Even though the PMDB government was at best tolerant of the MST, Sister Alda functioned like what Fox (1992) refers to as a "reformist," aligning with mobilized groups and internally facilitating the policy process. On November 19, 1995, the proposal for "Itinerant Schools" in MST camps went to the State Educational Advisory Board. Elizabete describes the events that occurred on the day of the vote:

On this day we brought a bus of kids from our camps to the State Education Advisory Board, along with some of the camp educators. These educators went with the children to participate in the discussions about the Itinerant Schools. This is an interesting story, because the children were outside the building pressuring the guards to enter. There was a discussion, and at first they were told that they could not enter, but eventually it was agreed that the children should enter and hear the debate about the Itinerant Schools. The Itinerant Schools were supposed to be the last point on the agenda, but as soon as the children entered the topic was put to the front of the agenda, and it passed right away.

The MST brought a total of 80 children to participate in the debate about the Itinerant Schools. Sister Alda argues that under this pressure, the State Educational Advisory Board was obligated to approve the proposal. Elizabete agrees that this political pressure was critical, however, she also argues that, "The proposal was so good, with its arguments about how to organize schools in

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<sup>268</sup> All quotes from Sister Alda Moura, unless noted, came from an interview on November 23, 2010.

<sup>269</sup> This advisory board consists of a combination of government officials, teacher union delegates, community members, and a student representative.

the camps, that there was no way for the government to say no. It was a right of the children, and it needed to be guaranteed.” Avelange, a member of the State Education Advisory Board in 2010, agrees that the merit of the proposal was part of its success: “The advisory board is a legal organization, a formal organization that follows established laws, but there was also a social sensibility in the advisory board at this time.”<sup>270</sup> This “social sensibility,” the quality of the proposal, and the pressure of the children helped secure the approval the Itinerant Schools.

With the advisory board’s approval, Governor Britto agreed to fund the Itinerant Schools as a two-year “pedagogical experiment.” It was the combination of *both* traditional social movement repertoires and Sister Alda’s role as a “reformist” within the PDB government, which allowed the MST to engage in a process of coproduction under a center-right tolerant government. Even after the proposal was passed, the role of internal maneuvering continued to be central. Sister Alda remembers that many people in the Secretary of Education were still opposed to the Itinerant Schools, and she had to spend much of her time visiting camps and taking pictures of the educational experiences in order to change people’s opinions. She says, “It was only possible to get the materials needed for the Itinerant Schools with my help. I am sure if I had not been in the Secretary of Education, this would never have happened.”

### ***Full Government Support: Olívio Dutra and the PT (1999-2002)***

In the same highly mobilized context that forced Governor Britto to implement the Itinerant School proposal, the first Workers Party (PT) governor in Rio Grande do Sul, Olívio Dutra, was elected in 1998. As Goldfrank (2011b) argues, Dutra was ideologically dedicated to participatory governance and—much more than other PT candidates across the country—he followed through on this position. Furthermore, there was significant overlap between PT and the MST activists in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The MST participated in a coalition of social movements attempting to transform the state by electing PT activists to office. Sometimes, the MST state leadership even supported candidates from its own ranks.<sup>271</sup> For example, Dionilso Marcon—who lives on an agrarian reform settlement right outside of Porto Alegre—was chosen by the MST to be a PT candidate for state congressman, as a “candidate that represents the social movements.”<sup>272</sup> Marcon first won the state congressional in 1998, the same year that Dutra was elected to the governorship. As a state congressman representing a region right outside of the capital, Congressman Marcon—and subsequently the MST—had very a close relation to the Dutra administration. Marcon was a state congressman for twelve years before finally becoming a federal congressman in 2010.<sup>273</sup>

In terms of the MST’s educational proposal, the Dutra administration embraced the movement’s educational ideas and offered the movement full government support. The Secretary of Education under Government Dutra, Lucia Camini, explains their relationship to the MST:

This was a very important political moment; we were growing so much in the state, and

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<sup>270</sup> Interview with Antonio Avelange Bueno, December 6, 2010.

<sup>271</sup> The MST’s official policy is to be independent from political parties. This means that if an MST activist runs for office, he or she no longer participates in the decision-making bodies of the movement.

<sup>272</sup> Interview with Dionilso Marcon on November 15, 2010.

<sup>273</sup> The MST did not support Marcon for this entire twelve-year period. The MST’s position was that different activists should be rotated through public office. Marcon went against this position, and chose to keep running for re-election. Nevertheless, Marcon still has a close relationship to the MST and the movement participated in his 2010 election to the federal congress.



with such credibility that we conquered the government. The government had to give into the social movements. The people that were put in the Secretary of Education were activists from the MST, they were people who had the experience of the movement . . . There was a political decision in our government not only to guarantee the Itinerant Schools, but to encourage the MST's participation in settlement schools as well . . . Olívio [Dutra] chose me for the Secretary of Education because the MST sent a letter to the governor recommending me . . . He was a defender of their proposal.<sup>274</sup>

In this interview, Lucia Camini emphasized the “blurring of the line between government and movement.” In other words, the Dutra government not only supported the MST financially but also placed MST activists within its ranks. Lucia Camini herself was a long-time activist in the state teachers union, and her sister Isabela Camini was an active member of the MST state education collective. Her sister had even helped to develop the teaching-certificate MAG high school programs in Braga in the early 1990s (see Chapter 3).<sup>275</sup>

Thus, with the election of Olívio Dutra in 1998, the Itinerant School proposal flourished. There were full degrees of coproduction, as the government continued to provide the financial resources, bureaucratic apparatus, and basic curriculum, while activists built the schools, chose the teachers, organized teacher trainings, incorporated the MST's identity into the schools, changed their organizational structure, and even had influence over much of the curriculum. High state capacity facilitated this process, as the state government was able to organize and finance statewide seminars about the Itinerant School, and offer administrative support for local community-school assemblies to take place. In an interview I conducted with ex-Governor Dutra in 2010, he remembered this process: “Since the camps were always moving, it was difficult to have a permanent school, so we supported the Itinerant Schools. We were responsible for all of the logistics to ensure that these schools could exist inside the camps.”<sup>276</sup> Lucia Camini recalled that the Itinerant School were originally made of black plastic—the same material as the tents in the camps—but she thought this color was too gloomy for children. She searched across the state to find a lighter color of plastic that the MST activists could use to build the Itinerant Schools. This type of full government support was typical of the Dutra administration.

Sister Alda Moura was asked to stay in the Secretary of Education and coordinate the Itinerant Schools that were being constructed throughout the state. The number of Itinerant Schools fluctuated frequently during this period, due to continual ebb and flow of new occupations, the construction of new camps, the disbanding of old camps, and the transition from camps to settlements. In order to keep the administrative records for all of the children in these Itinerant Schools, there was a need for a permanent state public school to be the official “sponsor” of these students in these schools. MST activist Elizabete Witcel already had a close relationship to her neighborhood school, Nova Sociedade (New Society), in the settlement Itapui. Elizabete had been one of the many activists who had fought for the construction of this school. During the Dutra administration, she helped Nova Sociedade become the “base school” of the Itinerant Schools, with the responsibility of keeping track of the student records and issuing the students' diplomas upon graduation.

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<sup>274</sup> All quotes and information in the rest of this chapter from Lucia Camini, unless otherwise noted, came from an interview with her on October 26, 2010.

<sup>275</sup> Isabela Camini wrote her doctoral dissertation on the MST's Itinerant Schools (Camini, 2009).

<sup>276</sup> Interview with Olívio Dutra, November 17, 2010.

In terms of MST-state coproduction, teacher training was one area that the government's support was critical. Sister Alda recalls: "The MST would choose the teachers, but we made sure they were all studying. This was the big contribution of the government, the continual training for the teachers in the Itinerant Schools." Elizabete also touches on this point:

When Olívio entered we created partnerships with the state government to have teacher-trainings. The proposal for the Itinerant School was that they should have teachers from the camps, which is why teacher-trainings were needed. The support of the government for teacher training was fundamental. Olívio helped a lot. He funded state seminars and formal courses in the camps and in the regions.

Since many of the people living in the camps did not have high school degrees, the MST education collective would send them to the three-year teaching-certificate MAG high school programs at the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC), in the city of Veranópolis. Between study periods these student-activists, who were also organic members of the MST camps, would contribute as teachers in the Itinerant Schools. In addition, Governor Dutra funded regional and statewide courses for all of the teachers in the Itinerant Schools to attend. The Itinerant Schools in Rio Grande do Sul quickly became national symbols of educational transformation, and MST activists from across the country came to learn from these experiences.

Despite these successes, not everything was "ideal" during the Dutra administration. Marli Zimmerman remembers that, although there were dozens of conferences and trainings, the period was also difficult "because they did not get all of the money they needed for the schools to function, it was a very rough reality." Carlota Amado recalls that the teachers in the Itinerant School would often receive their salaries late, or there would not be enough money, so they had to split their salaries among each other.<sup>277</sup> Furthermore, the MST had to continually mobilize to ensure that the materials, funding, and salaries need for the Itinerant Schools to function would arrive at the camps. Thus, despite the close relations that developed between the MST and the PT government, MST educational activists could never stop protesting or engaging in traditional social movement repertoires during this four-year period. To the contrary, MST protests continued in full force during the Dutra administration. In fact, during one MST mobilization in Porto Alegre encamped families from across the state occupied several government offices for seven months, and the Itinerant Schools spent this entire period functioning on the lawn outside of these offices—while still being funded by the state government.

In 2002, MST activists Marli Zimmerman and Elizabete Witcel took a state public exam (*concurso*) and became part of the official network of state teachers in Rio Grande do Sul. This allowed them to oversee the Itinerant Schools, as government employees in the State Regional Education Office (CRE) in the city of Canoas. There are thirty-nine CREs throughout the state, which are the bureaucratic bodies in charge of overseeing the thousands of state public schools across Rio Grande do Sul. The CRE in Canoas is in charge of the state public school Nova Sociedade, the official "sponsor" of the Itinerant Schools. As government employees for the CRE, Marli and Elizabete were able to oversee the Itinerant Schools in an official capacity, with many more resources than they had access to previously.

Marli describes their work in the CRE as "very interesting," since she was being paid to do the work she had previously done as an MST activist. She says that, "This was an exciting

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<sup>277</sup> All quotes from Carlota Amado, unless noted, came from an interview on November 26, 2010.

period for the Itinerant Schools. If there was a march the Itinerant Schools would go along with the march, and they would measure the kilometers the children were walking, and they would analyze the different vegetation they saw.” Her job ranged from constructing new Itinerant Schools when new land occupations took place, to motivating the teachers, to making sure the schools were following the MST’s educational proposal. Although Marli and Elizabete were now responsible for these tasks as official government employees, they still took their directions and orders from the MST state education collective.

### ***Return to Tolerance: Germano Rigotto and the PMDB (2003-2006)***

In 2002 the PT lost to the PMDB and another center-right governor, Germano Rigotto, came to power. Although Sister Alda had worked in the Secretary of Education for almost eight years, through both the Britto and the Dutra administrations, the new Secretary of Education asked her to leave the government. Sister Alda claims that this was because the Rigotto administration did not want a vocal supporter of the MST inside its ranks. Nonetheless, despite this lack of ideological alignment with the MST, the Rigotto administration left the MST’s educational proposals—including the Itinerant Schools—largely in place. This included continuing to pay Elizabete and Marli to oversee the Itinerant School as employees of the CRE in Canoas. In other words, Rigotto was *tolerant* of the MST’s educational proposal; although he did not support these initiatives as fully as the Olívio administration, where the MST was strong and organized, the movement’s educational proposal continued to develop.

Sonia Lopes dos Santos, an educational bureaucrat in charge of “rural education” during the Rigotto’s government, tried to explain the position of the Rigotto government. Concerning the Itinerant Schools, Sonia said, “We did not interfere at all in the pedagogy of the Itinerant Schools, the MST already had a lot of insightful publications about these schools and we always respected their ability to drive this educational process.” As she explains, the administrative and pedagogical part of the Itinerant Schools was the responsibility of the MST: “It was the MST that knew what they wanted in these schools, it was not our role to tell them what to do, the Itinerant Schools were a different type of school.”<sup>278</sup> Several other people I spoke with, both within the government and within the MST, confirmed this “lack of action” on the part of the Rigotto administration. For example, the previous Secretary of Education under the Dutra administration, Lucia Camini, said that Rigotto was calm (*tranquilo*) because he would say yes to everything, but then he would not give resources to anything. Former MST activist and state Congressman Marcon expressed a similar sentiment: “Rigotto did not have a big position on anything, he did not take positions. He did not close down the schools, but he did not help them either.” Ivori Morais, a member of the MST state education collective, said that the Secretary of Education under Governor Rigotto, José Fortunati, “Did nothing new with education.”<sup>279</sup> Even the Secretary of Education following the Rigotto administration, Mariza Abreu, commented on Rigotto’s lack of action: “Rigotto was scared of doing anything. He was scared of getting critiqued.”<sup>280</sup>

One major change that did occur during the Rigotto government is that the Itinerant Schools could no longer be funded with the MST as an intermediary. Rather, a third-party NGO had to administer these funds. As the movement often does in these legal situations, several MST activists created an NGO specifically for this purpose, Instituto Preservar. As a legal NGO, run

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<sup>278</sup> All quotes from Sonia Lopes dos Santos, unless noted, came from an interview on October 11, 2011.

<sup>279</sup> All quotes from Ivori Morais, unless noted, came from an interview on October 3, 2011.

<sup>280</sup> All quotes from Mariza Abreu, unless noted, came from an interview on November 1, 2010.

and directed by MST activists, the movement was able to still maintain control over the funds the Secretary of Education was directing towards the Itinerant Schools. However, as Bete explains, even though it was Instituto Preservar that was officially organizing the teacher trainings, it was the same MST education collective that was still actually in charge.

This legal distinction between Instituto Preservar and the MST allowed for the Rigotto administration to continue funding the Itinerant Schools. As another educational bureaucrat in the Secretary of Education explains, “The Itinerant Schools were not contracted through the movement, there was an NGO called Instituto Preservar that the government would fund. Then this NGO would contract the teachers. This was necessary, because the state could not find teachers who wanted to teach in the MST camps.”<sup>281</sup> Sonia Lopez dos Santos confirms this perspective, stating that the “Secretary of Education did not supervise the schools, they had a partnership with an organization who did this supervision, Instituto Preservar.”

Although Rigotto was not politically aligned with the MST’s educational project, his general tolerance of the movement, the legal relationship that developed between Instituto Preservar and the government, and the administration’s general lack of action, meant that the Itinerant Schools continued to function between 2003 and 2006. The Rigotto government even continued to hire Elizabete and Marli to work in the CRE in Canoas, to oversee the Itinerant Schools. This illustrates that a completely supportive government is not necessary for MST-state coproduction. However, this coproduction did not come with the same financial resources that the supportive Dutra administration had provided. Therefore, it was the MST’s own internal capacity that was critical to continuation of MST-state coproduction in this period.

In my interviews with MST activists and government officials, there were different perspectives on the “lack of funding” during this period. Sonia Lopes blames the funding issues on Instituto Preservar’s delayed accounting processes. She says, “We always had to pester (*corer atras*) the Institute, making sure they were doing proper accounting. This was public money, so we had to be really careful, which meant that there were a lot of salaries arrived late to the Itinerant Schools.” Marli Zimmerman had a different interpretation of this history. She says,

When Rigotto became the governor, everything slowly began to get worse. In the beginning of Rigotto’s administration, the MST was called to present the Itinerant School proposal to the Secretary of Education. I was the one who presented the proposal in front of Secretary of Education Fortunati. However, this administration was very slippery (*sabonete*), they just listened and washed their hands of everything. They did not ignore us, but they did not do anything about anything.

Thus, according to Sonia Lopez the Rigotto government was supportive of the Itinerant Schools but the accounting problems with Instituto Preservar prevented teacher salaries from arriving on time. In contrast, Marli believes that the administration was being “slippery,” listening to the MST’s demands but not following through on their promises.

Regardless of the correct interpretation, it is clear that the MST began to encounter many more financial difficulties during this four-year period than in the previous administration. Elizabete Witcel remembers that she had to write a lot of reports about the precariousness of the Itinerant Schools, and the many materials that they needed to make the schools successful. While I was in the school Nova Sociedade, in November of 2010, I read copies of the many letters that

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<sup>281</sup> All quotes from Anna Paula Baggio, unless noted, came from an interview on October 13, 2010.

Bete and Marli had written to the Secretary of Education in this period, detailing the materials that had been requested but had not arrived at the Itinerant Schools.<sup>282</sup>

Despite these difficulties', both Bete and Marli were still government employees overseeing the Itinerant Schools during the Rigotto administration, while still being full-time activists within the MST. The Institute Preservar was the NGO in charge of hiring teachers and organizing teacher trainings for the Itinerant Schools, while also being run by the MST. The combination of Governor Rigotto's tolerance, and the MST's internal capacity to organize the Itinerant Schools with very little resources, meant that full MST-state coproduction continued.

### ***Trajectories of State Public Schools***

In addition to the Itinerant Schools, the activists in the MST education collective in Rio Grande do Sul was also concerned about implementing the movement's pedagogies in the public schools being built on their settlements. Ivori Morais, an MST activist and member of the state education collective said that the movement's plan in the mid-1990s was to maintain two focuses within the education sector: the Itinerant Schools and the public schools located on settlements. However, as Ivori Morais explained, the work with the Itinerant Schools accelerated, MST activists began to lose their focus on the settlement schools. Although local MST activists were participating in the new public schools being built on their settlements, the *collective* emphasis among the MST leadership was on constructing the Itinerant Schools in the camps. Nonetheless, in locations where there was a strong organic link between the MST community and the school, significant levels of MST-state coproduction still developed.

For example, in the municipality of Santana do Livramento, MST activist Carmen Vedoratto became a teacher in a small elementary school on her settlement in the mid-1990s. From 1991 to 1992 Carmen had participated in one of the MST's high school teaching certificate courses in Braga (see discussion of MAG courses in Chapter 3), where she had learned about the movement's pedagogical proposal. She began to implement these pedagogies into her school by organizing the students into a collective association that had work responsibilities in the settlement's weaving industry, and by allowing students to self-govern the school. The leadership collective on the settlement set up an educational advisory board of MST activists who supported Carmen in all of her educational decisions, and also defended her if the government critiqued any of her actions in the school. Although Carmen had several conflicts with the government in early-1990s, during the Britto administration the state basically ignored the school. While the school never received sufficient resources, Carmen says that the community had almost complete autonomy over the educational process.<sup>283</sup>

When Olívio Dutra took power in 1999, the MST's focus was still primarily on the ten to fifteen Itinerant Schools located on the MST camps. Nonetheless, the four-year Dutra administration created an opening for more MST control in the state public schools in MST settlements as well. In my five months of field research in Rio Grande do Sul I was able to collect information about nine state public schools on settlements throughout the state.<sup>284</sup> I interviewed one to three teacher-activists in each of these schools (for a total of 16

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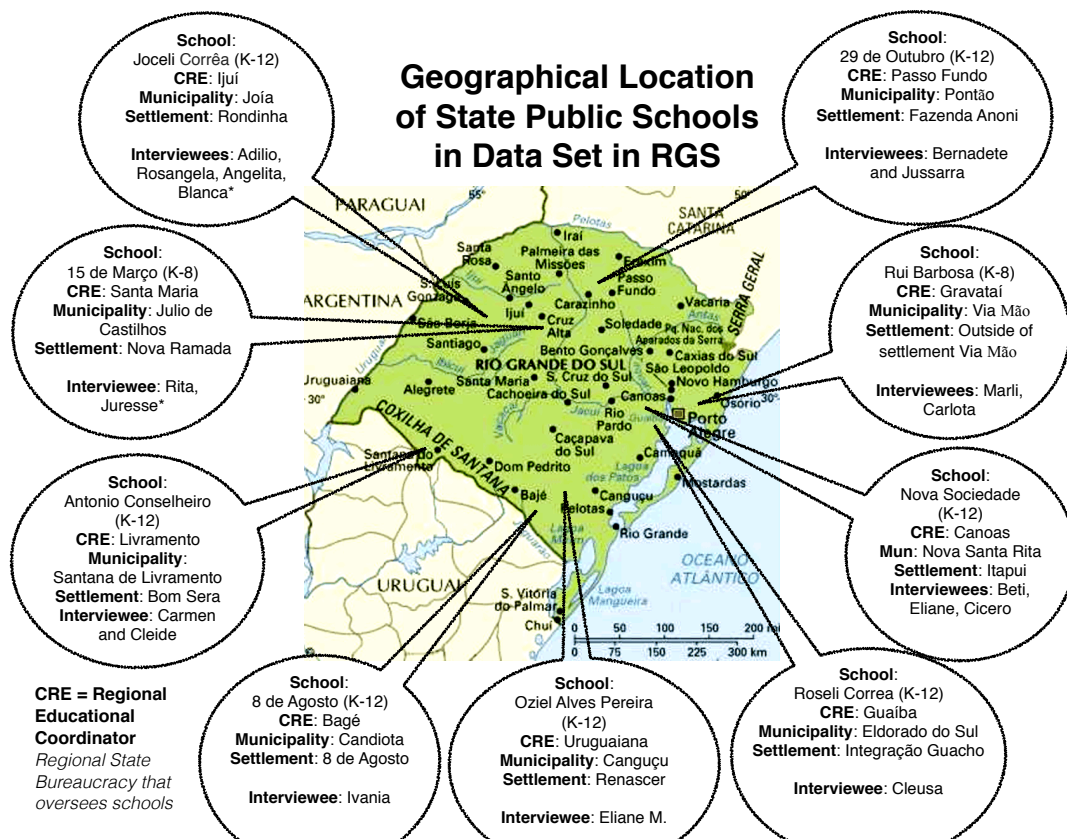
<sup>282</sup> Field notes, November of 2010.

<sup>283</sup> All quotes from Carmen Vedoratto, unless noted, came from an interview on January 5, 2010.

<sup>284</sup> The MST does not keep accurate numbers of the public schools on settlements, but my estimate is that this is approximately one-third of the state public schools on MST settlements, and well more than half of the state public schools that include high school.

interviewees<sup>285</sup>), visited five of the schools, and conducted extensive participant observation in three of the schools. In addition, I interviewed government officials at six of the Regional State Education (CREs), which are the bureaucrat bodies in charge of overseeing state public schools. I analyze much of this data in Chapter 7, as it was collected during the 2009-2011 educational context; however, the historical information in the interviews are critical for understanding the Dutra period as well. These interviews, and the observational data I collected in the schools, illustrate that the four-year Dutra administration was a critical moment for the future educational trajectories of these nine schools. Below is a map, indicating the location of each school, the name of the school, the CRE responsible for the school, the municipality and the MST settlement in which the school is located, and the MST activist-teachers I interviewed inside each school.<sup>286</sup>

Map 6.1: Geographical Location of State Public Schools in Data Set in RGS



The Dutra administration was important in determining the long-term trajectory of these state public schools for three internal and one conjunctural reason: 1) The Dutra government invested heavily in the infrastructure and founding of many of these schools; 2) The Secretary of Education organized school constitutional assemblies throughout the state, which allowed communities to participate in defining their school's own mission statement (know as in Brazil

<sup>285</sup> On the map below there are 18 interviewees mentioned, but two of them are starred. These two people are teachers who I collected a lot of information about, but was never able to interview in person, but who were important in understanding the MST's control of that particular school.

<sup>286</sup> Although I spoke informally with dozens of teachers in the five schools I visited, the formal interviews I conducted were all with MST activists who subsequently became teachers in these schools.

as the school's Political Pedagogical Project-PPP); 3) The government opened two state exams (*concurros*) during this period, that incorporated dozens of new teachers into the official state teachers network; 4) These public exams took place during the last two years of the Pedagogy of Land course that the MST had developed with the University of Ijuí (see Chapter 5). Together, these factors facilitated the development of high levels of MST-state coproduction in settlement schools, even though the movement's main priority remained the Itinerant Schools on camps.

The first factor concerns school infrastructure, and Governor Dutra's willingness to build dozens of new rural schools and expand the physical structure of the public schools that already existed on MST settlements. This investment is in direct contrast to subsequent political administrations, which closed down hundreds of rural schools in order to prioritize new public schools in urban centers.<sup>287</sup> However, because MST communities were more mobilized than communities in other rural regions, once a school was built or expanded on an MST settlement the government could not easily shut it down. Of the nine schools listed on Map 6.1, three of them were opened during the Dutra's administration; this included Joceli Corrêa in Joía, Oziel Alves Pereira in Canguçu, and Antonio Conselheiro in Santana do Livramento. In addition, three of the other six schools expanded to include high school during this period, including Nova Sociedade in Nova Santa Rita, 8 de Agosto in Candiota, and Roseli Correa in Eldorado do Sul. Therefore, of the nine schools in my data set, six of the schools were either founded or had major physical expansions during the Dutra administration.

Rosangela Nascimento, a teacher, MST activist, and ex-principal of the school Joceli Corrêa, explained that when the community first started discussing the need for a school they had a debate about whether they should ask the municipality of Joía or the state government to build the school. "We decided we wanted a state school and not a municipal school, because we had a lot of conflicts with the municipal government. At this point the municipality was not very welcoming of the settled people; we had just arrived and this caused conflicts. This is why we decided to fight for a state school."<sup>288</sup> The negotiations with the CRE in Ijuí began in 1998, during the last few months of the Britto administration; however, it was only when Dutra took office in 1999 that the new public school was approved and classes began. According to Rosangela, Governor Dutra was also important for authorizing new teachers to be sent to the school, and providing educational materials like science lab equipment and textbooks.

Eliane Beatriz Muller, the principal of Oziel Alves Pereira, tells a similar story. Her settlement was founded in 1999, and immediately afterwards the municipality of Canguçu built a new school on the settlement. However, Eliane explains, the community wanted to change it from a municipal to a state school, because the government of Canguçu was not sympathetic to the educational pedagogies the community wanted to implement in the school. "We went to the CRE in Uruguaiana and we had to wait five hours to hear the response about whether or not it could be a state school. But there was an opening under Olívio, which allowed us to turn our school into a state school; otherwise, this would never have happened."<sup>289</sup> According to Eliane, if there had been a different administration in power during this period her school would still be under the authority of the municipal government. However, due to Governor Dutra's supportive staff at the Regional State Education (CRE) office, the school became a state public school.

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<sup>287</sup> Interview with ex-Secretary of Education, Mariza Abreu.

<sup>288</sup> All quotes from Rosangela Nascimento, unless noted, came from an interview on December 18, 2010.

<sup>289</sup> All quotes from Eliane Beatriz Muller, unless noted, came from an interview on January 17, 2011.

A second long-term impact that the Dutra administration had on the trajectory of settlement schools was the establishment of “school constitutional assemblies” (*Constituinte Escolar*). A pamphlet published about these assemblies in June of 1999 states: “The creation of school constitutional assemblies is a process of direct participation of the school community with the *gaucho* society, in order to define the directions for public education in Rio Grande do Sul.”<sup>290</sup> These were not one-time assemblies, but rather, a four-year process of participatory forums that took place between 1999 and 2002 with community members, teachers, students, parents, principals, and government bureaucrats. There were several stages of this process, including collective studies of the “reality of current pedagogical practices,” and extended debates about the purpose and goals of education for particular community. Although, this participatory process was not limited to the schools on MST settlements, the debates on the settlements were particularly dynamic. The leaders of the MST already believed in this process of collective participation, and local MST activists used these forums as opportunities to discuss the movement’s pedagogical proposals, and to dialogue with the community about the purpose of public schooling in the overall struggle for agrarian reform.

The school mission statements—referred to as a Political Pedagogical Project (PPP)—were lengthy documents about educational purpose. For example, the PPP for the school Joceli Corrêa includes the following parts: An analysis of the history of the settlement (starting with the period of MST camps); the meaning of the name of the school; the characteristics of the students; the characteristics of the teachers; the general objective of the school; the conception of education and schooling; a statement about pedagogy; a list of the different dimensions of human formation; school methodology; and, the process of internal evaluation for the students, teachers, and school as a whole. The section on the “general objective” of school states: “To contribute to the construction of subjects with the capacity to analyze, reflect, and interact with the local and general reality, while also learning through practice, preparing equally for manual and intellectual labor, and becoming a subject of history in the society that we desire.”<sup>291</sup> Although this PPP has been re-written several times over the past decade, the document has its roots in the participatory school forums of the Dutra administration. As Angelita Perin, another teacher at Joceli Corrêa, says, “this was a period of high participation in the school.”<sup>292</sup>

One government official I spoke with at the Regional State Education (CRE) office in Santa Maria, expressed how impressed she was with the diversity of voices that were invited to participate in these debates. For example, the service workers at the schools, the parent-advisory boards, and the students were all invited to participate. This government officials remember that Dutra “was a popular government, and he was very much following the vision of Paulo Freire. This made his administration very different.”<sup>293</sup>

Nonetheless, despite these impressive spaces of popular debate, a major theme that was continually repeated in my interviews with government officials, teachers, and MST activists was that although this participatory process was important, most of the proposals that were discussed were never implemented. For example, Rosângela from the school Joceli Corrêa says, “Olívio really needed another term, because we put all of this thought into how we wanted our

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<sup>290</sup> Governo do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul. (1999) *Constituinte Escolar: Construção da Escola Democrática e Popular*. Caderno 3.

<sup>291</sup> Projeto Político Pedagógico (PPP), Escola Joceli Corrêa, 2006. This is an updated version of the original PPP that was created during the constitutional assemblies during the Dutra administration.

<sup>292</sup> All quotes from Angelita da Silva, unless noted, came from an interview on December 18, 2010.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with Vera (last name unknown), November 25, 2010.



school, and then it was time to put the talk into practice and the government ended.” Carmen from Santa do Livramento said that during this period they had dozens of meetings and the school community successfully wrote a Political Pedagogical Proposal, but as soon as Olívio left the new governments ignored the new PPP of the school. An interview with a government official in the CRE in Ijuí confirms the sentiment of these MST teacher-activists: “During Olívio there were lots of meetings and attempts to change the schools . . . but these discussions never got implemented.”<sup>294</sup> Nonetheless, in the state public schools on MST settlements, these new mission statements became the *written justification* for implementing many aspects of the movement’s pedagogical proposal over the next administration.

A third action that the Dutra administration took, which became the perhaps *the* most important factor contributing to the long-term trajectory of settlement schools in Rio Grande do Sul, was the opening of two public examinations (*concursos*) to expand the official network of state teachers in 2000 and 2002. A large group of MST activists took this test and entered the school system as new “official” school administrators and teachers. Once these MST activists became part of the official state teaching network their presence in the public schools was assured, regardless of the political position of the future government. Of the eighteen teacher-activists I interviewed in the state public schools on Map 6.1, nine of these activists (half of those interviewed) had become official state teachers during the public exams that opened in 2000 and 2002. For the state public school Joceli Corrêa, in the municipality of Joía, this meant three dedicated MST activists became teachers (Rosângela, Blanca, Adílio). Together, these three teacher-activists convinced the other teachers in the school to support the movement’s proposal. This was also the moment that Elizabete and Marli became state teachers—which was the reason the CRE in Canoas could hire them to oversee the Itinerant Schools in 2002. Other MST activists that became part of the state teaching network, including Carlota (Rui Barbosa), Carmen (Antonio Conselheiro), Rita (15 de Março), and Ivania (8 de Agosto). This was a *critical* moment for these activists to enter the state system, since no more exams opened for the next decade.

Finally, one conjunctural factor facilitated the entrance of these MST activists into the state public school system: the timing of Governor Dutra’s election, which coincided with the first Pedagogy of Land bachelor degree that the MST organized with the University of Ijuí (see information on PRONERA in Chapter 5). Coincidentally, this university-level pedagogy course took place from 1999 to 2002, the same years as the Dutra administration. As Adílio explains, there were a lot of MST activists from Rio Grande do Sul who were taking this course. “Because activists from Rio Grande do Sul were in the majority, a bunch of us in the course were able to enter the state public school network during these two exams. It was the combination of this course we were taking and Olívio’s decision.”<sup>295</sup> Marli Zimmerman also emphasizes the importance of the Pedagogy of Land degree program: “I had taken a lot of public exams, but I had never passed. I only passed the state exam in 2002 because it was right after I graduated from the Pedagogy of Land course. Everything was fresh in my head, which is why I passed.” Of the nine MST activists who became state school teachers in 2000 and 2002, eight of them were in the Pedagogy of Land degree program at the University Ijuí.

The story of MST activist and teacher, Cleusa Reichenbach, illustrates why these public exams were so critical for MST control of the settlement schools. Cleusa first began working in the school Roseli Correa in the early 1990s. Initially she had a lot of freedom to work in public

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<sup>294</sup> Interview with Noemi Huth, November 29, 2010.

<sup>295</sup> All quotes from Adílio Perin, unless noted, came from an interview on November 28, 2010.

school and implement the pedagogies she had learned through the high school MAG teaching-certificate course in Braga. “However, it was in this school that a stereotype developed that the MST was teaching terrorism. The head of the CRE in Guaíba started to persecute me . . . she wanted to kick me out but she could not, because the community said no.” However, Cleusa’s job was unstable because she was working through a contract, not as part of the official state teaching network. Eventually, the CRE was able to fire her with the justification that someone in the official network of teachers needed her position.<sup>296</sup> This example illustrates the importance of MST activists taking the public exams and becoming official state teachers, especially given the conflicts that often develop between MST activists and the local CRE government officials.

Finally, during my data collection in Rio Grand do Sul I asked dozens of MST activists, activist-teachers, and school principals what are the most important factors that allow for the MST’s control of public schools on agrarian reform settlements. The overwhelmingly response was that it is the dedication of *a collective of teachers* within the school is critical. This does not mean that all of the teachers in the school have to be MST activists; rather, it is necessary for a *small collective* of MST activists to be present, who know about the movement’s educational proposal and can convince the other teachers about the merits of this approach. Here are the responses from the activists and teachers I interviewed, emphasizing this point:

The teachers within the school have to be willing to make a difference.  
–Eliane M. (school principal, Oziel Alves Pereira)

It depends on the teachers in the schools. They do not have to be from the settlements, but they have to be teachers who understand the political line of the movement, who are connected to the movement. –Cleusa (former teacher, Roseli Correa)

Most important is a group of educators that maintain the proposal of the school and who helped to construct the school from the very beginning. If the group is not united then the process is very hard. –Adilio (school principal, Joceli Correa)

The professors work in various school, so it is hard to get a collective unity about one particular school . . . If there are professors that are connected to the fight, they do not have to be settlers, but they have to have some kind of link or connection. – Elizabete

The intention of the professors and community is critical. The willingness of professors to do something new. – Marli (school principal, Rui Barbosa)

The training of the teachers is important, most of these teachers have no familiarity with the pedagogy of the movement. – Carmen (teacher, Antonio Conselheiro)

In the last instance it is the teachers that are coordinating the daily activities in the classroom. That is why collectives of teachers is so important. – Edgar Kolling (national MST Education Sector)

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<sup>296</sup> All quotes from Cleusa de Oliveria Reichenbach came from an interview on November 27, 2010.

The teachers are very important, a lot of times the professors are against the movement, or they just come to get a salary and do not really care about education. There needs to be schools with educators who are MST activists, and with a school principal who supports the struggle . . . In the end the people in the school are the educators. A popular government does not mean you are going to have a different type of school. A lot comes from the teachers, if the teachers want to leave the daily routine of the classroom and do something new, they will do it. – Izabela Braga (State MST Education Sector, RS)

As these quotes describe, the presence of a collective of teacher-activists in the school who are dedicated to the MST's pedagogical proposal is critical for MST-state coproduction to develop. Therefore, the fact that small collectives of MST activists were able to become official state teachers during Dutra's Administration, in some of the largest and most important public schools on MST settlements in Rio Grande do Sul, undoubtedly shaped the long-term trajectories of these schools. During my visits to five of these schools in 2010 and 2011, the same educators who entered the schools during the Dutra administration were the ones continuing to dialogue with the other teachers about the MST's educational proposal.

When Rigotto took office in 2003, his policy of "non-confrontation" (discussed in length in the previous section) meant that these collectives of activists could continue to implement aspects of the MST's educational proposal. For example, Rosangela says that when Rigotto took power, the PPP of their school was already constructed and could not be changed. She says, "The new governor cannot just change a proposal, we were able to maintain our proposal during the Rigotto government." Rosangela also said that they had a good relationship with the CRE in Ijuí during the Rigotto government. For her, "Rigotto was neither here nor there." Cicero Marcolan, the school principal of Nova Soiedade in 2010, says that, "When the PT was in power there was more possibility of dialogue, there was more space for negotiation. When Rigotto entered it was not as easy, but it was also not impossible at this point." Cicero even told one story about the Rigotto administration's overt support of the settlement schools. The nation-wide famous magazine *Veja* published an article during this period about the school Nova Soiedade, which critiqued the use of the MST's flag within the school. As Cicero explains, "The secretary of education then was Fortunati, who is the current mayor of Porto Alegre. He came out in support of the school. He went on television and said it is the right of the school to have the MST flag, because it was inside a settlement and this was part of its history." Therefore, at times the Rigotto administration went beyond tolerance to openly supporting the MST's presence in these schools.

Sometimes, however, these relationships depended on the relationship between the local MST activists and government officials the regional CRE. Carmen, for example, faced many serious barriers during the Rigotto government. It was during this period that her small elementary school was closed down and she was transferred to a high school on a bordering settlement, Antonio Conselheiro. However, despite this diversity in experiences, the general sentiment of the teachers in the nine settlement schools was that the Rigotto administration represented a general continuation of the educational policies of the previous government.

### ***Federal Policies Arrive in Rio Grande do Sul (2004 to 2011)***

While the MST state education collective in Rio Grande do Sul was struggling to construct the Itinerant School Proposal, implement the movement's pedagogies in settlement schools, and garner more support for education in areas of agrarian reform from the state government, national-level MST activists were busy fighting for similar demands at the federal

level. As I describe in Part II of this dissertation, the MST national leadership was able to garner support for their educational proposal at the federal level in the late 1990s by shifting their framing of their proposal from “education in areas of agrarian reform” to *Educação do Campo* (education of the countryside). By 2001, through an alliance between the MST and the rural union confederation, CONTAG, the national education advisory board under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso had passed a law supporting the right to *Educação do Campo* in all rural areas. In 2004, President Lula took the first steps towards institutionalizing this law by creating a Department for Diversity within the Ministry of Education (MEC), which included an *Educação do Campo* office. The first coordinator of this office, Antonio Munarim, then began a process of disseminating information about this new educational proposal in each of the 26 Brazilian states.

In order to “disseminate information” and convince state Secretaries of Education to embrace the *Educação do Campo*, the MEC organized State Seminars on *Educação do Campo*. In many states, these seminars were the first moment that state secretaries of education were forced to think about the specific demands and needs of the rural populations. However, in Rio Grande do Sul, due to the historical strength of the MST education collective, these conversations had already been happening for the past decade. In fact, unlike other states, the MEC seminar on *Educação do Campo* in Rio Grande do Sul, which took place in 2005, was almost a non-event partly because “the bureaucrats in the state secretary of education already believed they were dealing with issues of diversity and rural education in the state. For example, Sonia Lopez, the government official in charge of “rural education” in the Rigotto administration, expressed resentment that the MEC wanted to host a seminar on *Educação do Campo* in her state. Sonia had worked with Department of Rural Education in Braga since the early 1990s, and she even been marginally involved in coordinating the first teaching-certificate MAG high school programs with the MST. In reference to the MEC seminar, she says:

In the Ministry of Education there was an attempt to organize schools around the idea of diversity, but we had taken these actions first . . . We felt that the Ministry of Education was imposing a politics for rural education that it wanted all of the states to accept . . . we did not accept the Ministry’s proposal, they could not force us to do this . . . They wanted us to use the phrase *Educação do Campo* but we said no, we have our own commission for rural education . . . for us the name did not matter.

Thus, while the MEC seminars on *Educação do Campo* had a humongous impact on other states, in Rio Grande do Sul the seminar did not affect any state policies. The state secretary of education did not even begin using the phrase *Educação do Campo* until many years later, and instead, continued to refer to their educational programs for the countryside as “rural education.” As Sonia’s quotes illustrate, the educational bureaucrats in the Secretary of Education during the Rigotto administration thought they were above these discussions.

I also asked several MST activists about this state seminar, and its affect on the movement’s relationship with the state government. In contrast to other states, none of these MST activists I spoke with in Rio Grande do Sul remember the event with any particular importance. In fact, MST activist Ivori Morais does not even recall the MST participating: “Maybe the Ministry of Education and the universities participated, but we did not participate. The debate about *Educação do Campo* did not really occur in Rio Grande do Sul . . . the state secretary of education just returned to calling this rural education, not *Educação do Campo*.” While many other states created permanent state advisory boards for *Educação do Campo* following this

seminar, in Rio Grande do Sul this type of state-society council never developed. It was only during the right-leaning administration of Yeda Crusius (discussed in Chapter 7) that these federal policies became an important educational force within the state.

### ***Conclusions***

In conclusion, in Rio Grande do Sul between 1996 and 2006 the MST was largely successful incorporating the movement's educational proposals into the state public school system, both through the Itinerant Schools on MST camps and the public schools on settlements. Initially, this was a result of two different factors: 1) The movement's use of traditional social movement repertoires such as protests, marches, and occupations; and, 2) A passionate reformist within the state government who was aligned with the MST. This combination of factors convinced a centrist government to allow the MST to participate in the state public school system.

Then, in the late 1990s, increasingly high levels of social movement mobilization led to the election of a left-leaning PT government. This was a period that blurred the lines between the movement and the government, as MST activists quickly became embedded within the PT administration. These relationships allowed for full MST-state coproduction to develop in the Itinerant schools located on MST camps. The Dutra administration was also critical to the MST's long-term control of the state public schools on MST settlements. The government founded many of these schools, and invested in their overall infrastructure of other settlement schools throughout the state. The government also created a four-year participatory process through which MST communities could define the educational goals of their schools, and opened a public exam allowing for many MST activists to become part of the official state public school network. This ensured the long-term presence of small collectives of MST activist-teachers dedicated to implementing the movement's educational proposal in these schools.

During the four-year Dutra administration, MST activists succeeded in implementing many of the movement's curricular and organizational proposals in the state public school system on camps and settlements. The curricular proposals included adapting school curriculum to value rural life, moving beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, encouraging students to engage in both manual and intellectual labor, including agro-ecological training and collective forms of work into the daily curriculum, and studying the history of agrarian reform. In terms of organizational proposals, activists transformed traditional hierarchies by forming student collectives and encouraging teachers to claim an equal voice in school leadership. When another centrist governor came to power in 2003, the administration decided it was more politically savvy to allow the MST's initiatives to continue than to face MST discontent. Although the MST's educational initiatives were not as fully supported, this tolerance meant that *where the MST had strong levels of mobilization in civil society* activists were able to maintain the movement's educational proposal.

This story of educational success in Rio Grande do Sul between 1996 and 2006 is not the same for every state public school in Rio Grande do Sul. For example, as described in Chapter 5, in the settlement Fazenda Anoni there was a conflict between the MST and two teachers (Bernadete and Jussarra) in the school 29 de Outubro. Due to these conflicts, these two teachers decided to take down the MST flag from the walls of their school and distance themselves from the movement. However, this case illustrates why it is the combination of the high levels of MST mobilization in civil society and a tolerant to supportive government, which makes MST-state coproduction possible in Rio Grande do Sul. In other words, independent of levels of government support, if the MST loses their connection to the community then implementing the movement's educational proposal in public schools becomes almost impossible. In the next case

of Ceará there is also a supportive government and high levels of MST mobilization, however, I analyze why *state capacity* is also a critical factor for state-society coproduction to develop.

## **Ceará: The Critical Role of State Capacity**

The state of Ceará, located in the Northeastern part of the country, is currently one of the top tourist destinations in Brazil due to its long, pristine coastline. Most of the geography of the state, however, encompasses the *sertão* region, where the climate is semi-arid and small-scale agricultural production is difficult due to lack of irrigation. Poverty and death have been constant threats for the *sertanejo* population in Ceará, especially between 1978 and 1983 during a five-year period of extreme drought when many rural people were forced to leave their communities and migrate to capital. Despite this history of poverty, in 2008 Ceará was the twelfth richest state in Brazil, contributing to 2 percent of the country's GDP—the third highest contribution of the 16 north and northeastern states. The population was estimated at 8.5 million in 2010, 75 percent of those being urban residents, the eighth highest population of the twenty-six states (IBGE, 2011).

### ***The MST in Ceará***

The first MST occupation in Ceará occurred in 1989. Although there had been activists from Ceará who participated in the I National Congress of the MST in 1985, these activists did not succeed in constructing an MST organization in their state. Consequently, MST activists from the south of the Brazil went to Ceará in 1989, helping to organize an occupation of 300 families in the middle of the *sertão* region. Nine days after this land occupation took place, the 300 families in the occupation in addition to 200 other rural families were given land rights. A few months later, in September, these activists organized 800 more families to occupy another large land estate in the *sertão*. Unlike the first occupation, this one ended in a series of conflicts with rural elites who were part of the Rural Democratic Union (UDR). The families were evicted from the land several times and had to occupy other properties in the region. Eventually, the 800 families were also given land rights in new agrarian reform settlements. These initial victories were critical to the rapid expansion of the MST in the state of Ceará throughout the 1990s (Morissawa, 2001, p. 187). In 2011, there were 207 MST settlements in Ceará, and 27 camps of families still waiting for land rights.

Maria de Jesus, a member of the national MST leadership and head of the MST education sector in 2011, remembers these initial land occupations. She always had an affinity for teaching, and she began working as a teacher for her municipality shortly after finishing fourth grade—the highest level of education it was possible to access in her rural community. In 1987, when she was fifteen-years old, she took a course that was based in liberation theology that transformed her perspective on poverty and inequality. She became more involved in the local CEB (Base Ecclesial Communities), helped to found the Workers' Party in her municipality in the early 1980s, and became a leader in her teachers' union.<sup>297</sup>

She remembers that the MST arrived in her community in 1989, in order to discuss the upcoming land occupations. She did not participate in the first MST land occupation, but when a second occupation happened in her municipality of Candidé she went to visit the camp. She became involved in organizing educational activities on the camp, and soon after, she was invited to participate in the first encounter of educators of agrarian reform in Ceará, in 1991.

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<sup>297</sup> All quotes from Maria de Jesus, unless noted, came from an interview on September 5, 2011.

National MST educational activists Edgar Kolling and Rosali Caldart participated in this meeting. Maria de Jesus remembers, “When I learned about the pedagogy of the MST I fell in love, I had dreamed about finding this movement, it was addressing everything I was angry about. I knew that people were not poor because God wanted them to be poor.”<sup>298</sup> Although Maria de Jesus knew it was her future to be part of this cause, connecting her passion for education to the struggle for agrarian reform.

Over the next decade, Maria de Jesus had the opportunity to learn more about the MST’s pedagogical approach, first by participating in one of the MST’s teacher-certificate high school courses (known as MAG) in Braga, Rio Grande do Sul (see Chapter 3), and then, in the MST’s first Pedagogy of Land bachelor degree program at the University of Ijuí, funded through PRONERA (see Chapter 5). Shortly afterwards, Maria de Jesus took another PRONERA post-bachelor course focused on *Educação do Campo*, which was hosted by the Federal University of Santa Catarina. Maria de Jesus also participated in all of the major national MST educational conferences during this period, including the First Encounter of Educators in Areas of Agrarian Reform in 1997, and the first and second Seminars for *Educação do Campo* in 1998 and 2004.

Maria de Jesus was central in helping to organize dozens of educational activities in Ceará, together with an expanding collective of MST educational activists. One of these initiatives was *Brasil Alfabetizado* (Literacy Brazil), a literacy campaign the MST organized for 7,000 agricultural workers in Ceará through a partnership with the Ministry of Education. In the 2000s, MST activists in the Ceará state education sector began offering their own version of the high school teaching-certificate programs that had been developed in Rio Grande do Sul. Known as MAG da Terra, the state education sector decided to offer six of these high school courses simultaneously across the state. In addition, in the 2000s, the education sector was able to utilize PRONERA funding to offer several bachelor degree programs, two in the Pedagogy of Land, one in Journalism, and one in Social Services. The MST education sector also worked with the Cuban literacy program *Sim Eu Posso*, organized dozens of marches of *sem-terrinha* (little landless ones), and initiated the first discussions on infant education within the MST. In certain locations these activists were also able to develop good relations with municipal authorities, and implement some of the movement’s pedagogies in municipal schools. Despite all of these accomplishments, however, the MST education sector in Ceará had not yet developed a relationship with the state government, until the federal government intervened in 2006.

### ***Arrival of Educação do Campo in Ceará (2005-2006)***

When I arrived in Ceará in September of 2011, it was easy to find people in the state Secretary of Education who knew about the MST’s educational proposal. Similarly to the Ministry of Education, there was a Secretary of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity, and Inclusion. Also in a parallel structure to the Ministry of Education, within this Secretariat there was a Department of Diversity, headed by long-time rural activist Nohemy Ibanez, and within this department an office of *Educação do Campo*. The MST education collective in Ceará had a direct line of communication with this office, participating in the Ceará Committee for *Educação do Campo* and influencing the administration of four state public schools on MST settlements. However, in contrast to other states where these types of relationships had developed independent of the federal government, in Ceará these developments were a direct consequence of the Ministry of Education’s interventions in the state between 2005 and 2010.

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<sup>298</sup> This number is based on the MST’s own numbers. (Interview with Maria de Jesus, September 5, 2011).

Prior to 2005, the MST education sector in Ceará did not have a direct relationship with the state government. From 1995 to 2002, when the right-leaning PSDB governor Tasso Jereissati was in power, the movement had an extremely antagonistic relationship to the state government. The following PSDB governor, Lúcio Alcântara, had a bit more political opening and could be described as having a tolerant orientation towards the MST. The movement engaged with the state government around dozens of different issues, such as infrastructure, loans, agricultural assistance, and health; however, educational demands were not on the table. First of all, the public schools on MST settlements were all municipal schools. Secondly, the state Secretary of Education had a traditional orientation towards rural schooling, assuming that these schools would eventually disappear as families migrated to the city, and therefore, it was only necessarily to invest in new schools in urban centers. As Nohemy Ibanez, the eventual director of the Department of Diversity, said: “Before it was rural education . . . it was a policy of migration, industrialization, abandoning rural areas. The idea was that everyone would go to the peripheries of the cities and the countryside was going to disappear.” The idea of *Educação do Campo* had not yet arrived within the Ceará state government.

This situation transformed in 2005, when the head of the *Educação do Campo* office in the Ministry of Education (MEC), Antonio Munarim, organized the first Ceará State Seminar on *Educação do Campo*. As discussed in chapter 4, these seminars were part of the MEC’s countrywide effort to inform state and municipal governments about the *Educação do Campo* Federal Guidelines (passed in 2001), and encourage subnational governments to implement these guidelines in rural schools. For some states, like São Paulo, the amount of resources that the MEC was dedicating to these initiatives were inconsequential, and could easily be ignored. However, for the relatively poor state of Ceará, which still faced tremendous barriers providing quality education for its entire population, the MEC’s arrival garnered a lot of interest.

Claudia Avelar began working in the Ceará Secretary of Education in the mid-1970s, still during the period of military dictatorship. Although she was born in the capital of Fortaleza and identifies as “completely urban,” in 1985 she was part of a rural literacy project and began to learn for the first time about agrarian reform. “It was the first time I heard about agrarian reform. I had gone through college during the period of military dictatorship, we did not talk about agrarian reform then.” Over the next two decades she had various experiences working in agrarian reform settlements, as a government official in the Secretary of Education. She says that when Antonio Munarim arrived in Ceará in 2005, she had already “read something” about the national seminars on *Educação do Campo* in Brasília. She was familiar with the term. She said, “Munarim came here to talk to the Secretary of Education, and he asked us to organize a seminar on the *Educação do Campo* Federal Guidelines. The Secretary of Education called on me to do this, because I already had a history with the settlements . . . I was asked to organize a seminar for 350 people.” Claudia invited representatives from the regional state education coordinators (CREDEs), municipal secretaries of education, the universities, and other organizations in the countryside—including the rural union movement, FETREACE, and the MST.<sup>299</sup>

The seminar was a four-day long event in which participants read the *Educação do Campo* Federal Guidelines, discussed what they meant, and planned actions for their implementation. It was out of this first seminar in 2005 that the Ceará Committee for *Educação do Campo* was born. The state government passed an ordinance for the creation of the committee, which would include a combination of government, university, and civil society

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<sup>299</sup> All quotes from Claudia Avelar, unless noted, came from an interview on September 15, 2011.



representatives. The MST and FETREACE immediately became leaders in the committee. Slowly, the conception of education in rural areas began to shift in the state Secretary of Education—at least among the government officials involved in these initiatives. For example, the Secretary of Education published a document after the first seminar that states, “*Educação do Campo* is a political and pedagogical conception that is intended to create a more dynamic link between human beings and the production of their social conditions. *Educação do Campo* relates to the land and the environment, and respects the populations of the forest, fishing communities, miners, agricultural workers, cattle ranchers, hunters, and rivers.” This government document shows that even at this initial stage the proposal for *Educação do Campo* was openly linked to an alternative form of social and economic development in the countryside.

Why did Governor Lúcio Alcântara support these initiatives? According to Claudia, “He was not very open, but the Ministry of Education, Munarim, they were pushing this so much in the state.” In other words, it was the influence of the MEC that forced *Educação do Campo* into the educational debate in Ceará. And it was the resources that the MEC provided that helped implement these initiatives in practice. After the first state seminar was over, Claudia was chosen to be the point person for *Educação do Campo* in Ceará, the liaison between the state secretary of education and the Ministry of Education. The MEC continued to support the *Educação do Campo* initiatives in Ceará throughout 2006.

In March of 2006, the MEC asked Claudia to organize a second Seminar on *Educação do Campo*. Antonio Munarim came from Brasília to give the opening talk, which emphasized the historical connection between the *Educação do Campo* proposal and the mobilization of social movements: “The Secretary of Diversity in the MEC was born from the social movements . . . public policies are only created through the struggle of the social movements, if there is not continual mobilization and oversight by organized civil society, these initiatives will just be government programs [not public policies].”<sup>300</sup> On the second day of the seminar, participants worked in small groups to develop a document about their “conception” of schooling in the countryside. The final document of the seminar states that schools in the countryside should

rescue the identity and culture of the populations, respect different academic calendars, be dedicated to human formation, be part of a class project, be part of the dynamic of the countryside, prepare students for constructing a different society, have disciplines related to the reality of the countryside, have a character of critical reflection not training, be based in the reality of students in the countryside, produce different types of knowledges, work with the memory and cultural resistance of the populations, be preoccupied with the self-esteem of the student, strengthen the construction of identity through valuing students’ culture, activism, and self-esteem . . .<sup>301</sup>

As this document illustrates, the conception of *Educação do Campo* in Ceará was directly influenced by the MST’s educational approach. Ideas such as preparing students for a class project, or for the construction of a different society, are all components of the MST’s educational proposal. Now these ideas were becoming institutionalized in Ceará.

In December of 2006, the Committee for *Educação do Campo* organized a teacher-training course for teachers working in rural areas. For five days hundreds of teachers studied the

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<sup>300</sup> Secretaria de Educação Básica, “Síntese do III Seminário Estadual de Educação do Campo.”

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

theoretical foundations of *Educação do Campo*, listened to MST activists describe their experiences implementing this educational proposal, analyzed the relationship between *Educação do Campo* and issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and age, and discussed the possibilities of incorporating *Educação do Campo* into the state curriculum in Ceará. All of these new discussions and debates were moving forward, with the institutional support of the MEC.

In January of 2007, a mere week after this *Educação do Campo* teacher training, Cid Gomes of the left-leaning Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) came to power. The MST leadership in Ceará had a historically closer relationship with the PSB than with the previous PSDB administration. Therefore, for the MST the election of Cid Gomes meant more political opening. However, in an odd twist of fate, this was also the moment that the Ministry of Education began to withdraw much of its financial support for *Educação do Campo* in Ceará. According to Armênio Schmidt, the Secretary of Diversity in the Ministry of Education during this period, the MEC was moving from a focus on “devolving information about *Educação do Campo* in the states,” to “implementing actual programs” (such as the LEDOC and Escola Ativa programs discussed in Chapter 4). In addition, Antonio Munarim, who had been at the forefront of constructing these MEC-state government relationships between 2004 and 2006, had been fired the previous August. Consequently, the social movements on the Committee for *Educação do Campo* were left with more political opening, but no capacity to implement their mandate.

Claúdia Avelar remained the point person in charge of *Educação do Campo*; however this was now in addition to her regular tasks in the Secretary of Education. She explained, “In the Lúcio period the Ministry of Education was behind us, and always gave us resources. If they wanted us to implement something, we would implement it. We would divulge information, everything was possible . . . Lúcio supported us, always cautiously (*pé atrás*), but he would do it because the Ministry of Education was there . . . I had much more support during Lúcio, than I did in the beginning of Cid Gomes’ administration.” Claudia said that this was the period that the Committee for *Educação do Campo* began to go down the “the wrong path.” There were no resources to organize their meetings or implement their proposals, and committee members stopped showing up. Despite the election of a government with a more supportive orientation towards the MST, this lack of capacity within the state of Secretary of Education was a huge barrier. It was only a few years later—when social mobilization, political opening, and federal intervention met—that MST-state coproduction began to move forward at an accelerated pace.

### ***Mobilization, Political Opening, and State Capacity Meet (2007-2010)***

Maria de Jesus, for her part, had always been skeptical of the Committee for *Educação do Campo*. She says, “The problem with committees and advisory boards is that their major role is that of information and public relations; it is only the struggle that wins victories in the end.” With this orientation in mind, the Ceará state leadership organized dozens of protests between 2007 and 2008—including a 12-day occupation of the capital building in March of 2007—with a list of demands for the new governor. Among these demands was the construction of 64 state public schools on MST settlements, including ten high schools. Up until that point, there was not a single municipal or state high school on any MST settlement. Consequently, the youth living in MST settlements had to migrate to the city after finishing primary school. Constructing high schools on MST settlements was a high priority for the MST education sector in Ceará.

In response to these protests, Governor Gomes agreed to many of the MST’s demands, including the constructing of the ten high schools on MST settlements. However, the Governor’s implementation of this promise proved difficult in practice. The state Secretary of Education claimed it did not have the funding to build these new schools. Meanwhile, the Committee for

*Educação do Campo* office was falling apart without any institutional support. For the next two years the *Educação do Campo* “program” within the state Secretary of Education slowly disappeared. Claudia Avelar returned to her previous responsibilities in the department of teaching and pedagogy. In 2007, Valotenia Gomes was hired by the administration to be the new point person with the MEC concerning *Educação do Campo*. However, Valotenia explained, “There was no structure, it was only very specific moments, a committee meeting, a conversation with the MEC, there was no constant discussion about *Educação do Campo*.”<sup>302</sup> Despite Cid Gomes’ nominal support for building public schools in the countryside, the state government’s lack of capacity was preventing the construction of these schools.

This situation transformed in 2009, when the Ministry of Education created a new program for funding the construction of new high schools. The state Secretary of Education submitted a request to this program, and the federal government approved funding for the construction of eleven new public high schools in Ceará. With very little discussion or debate, Governor Gomes agreed to build four of these eleven new schools on MST settlements, and one in a FETREACE settlement. The MST had full autonomy to choose the location of these four new high schools. Full levels of MST-state coproduction developed, as the MST was also given autonomy to choose the principals and teachers in these schools, in addition to influencing their curriculum and organizational structure. The fact that Cid Gomes allowed the MST to have so much autonomy over these new schools suggests that his previous claim—that he was not constructing the schools due to lack of capacity—was at least partially correct.

Once the state Secretary of Education had the funding to construct these new high schools in 2009, the government officials in charge of *Educação do Campo* in the Secretary of Education were imbued with a new sense of purpose. These five new high schools were now known as *Escolas do Campo*, and the government passed a resolution that these schools had to be based in the *Educação do Campo* proposal. As a state official hired to oversee these schools explained, “The government makes a distinction between these *Escolas do Campo* and the 46 other state schools in rural areas. Those are rural schools and our *Educação do Campo* office has nothing to do with them.”<sup>303</sup> In 2009 there was also a restructuring of the Secretary of Education. A Secretary of Continual Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion was created, and within it a Department of Diversity was established, which would oversee the *Educação do Campo* office. Nohemy Ibanez, a woman with decades of experience working in rural areas and on MST settlements, was put in charge of this department.

Thus, while Claudia and Valotenia had been almost completely isolated in their coordination of *Educação do Campo* between 2007 and 2009, there was now an entire team dedicated to overseeing the five new *Escolas do Campo*—in direct communication with the MST and FETREACE. The construction of these five new high schools was a consequence of three interacting factors. First of all, massive social mobilizations were critical to the construction of these new schools. As Nohemy Ibanez explained, “The government is very attentive to these issues when the movements are pressuring him . . . today Ceará has the MST, FETREACE, the ‘scream of the land,’ religious groups . . . and these different subjects have forced the state to open its eyes to the countryside . . . Today there are five *Escolas do Campo*, and the movements helped to build these schools.” Similarly, MST activist-principal Ivaniza Nascimento said, “The

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<sup>302</sup> All quotes from Valotenia Gomes, unless noted, came from an interview on September 15, 2011.

<sup>303</sup> All quotes from Ana Cristina de Oliveira Rodrigues (technical assistant of *Educação do Campo*) came from an interview on September 6, 2011.

process of getting this school was through various camps, occupying the secretary of agriculture, this is how we got these schools.” According to both the government officials and MST activist, social mobilization was critical to the construction of these new *Escolas do Campo*.

However, social mobilization was not enough. A second influential factor was the election of a governor that had a more supportive orientation towards the MST. As Maria de Jesus explained, “With Cid there was more of an opening. Lúcio would never have built the schools, these schools were only built because the government changed . . . and also because of the federal program that helped to fund these schools. Cid took advantage of this federal program to construct these schools.” Another MST activist in the Ceará education collective, Erivando Barbosa de Sousa, confirms this assessment: “Cid is a person who is closer to the movements, but it is not an ideological orientation of the government, it is opportunism.”<sup>304</sup> Valotenia Gomes, who was also working in the Secretary of Education during this period, agreed: “For Cid Gomes the questions is more political, the government needs to have a good relationship with the MST.” This interviews suggest that although the previous governor had been open to specific *Educação do Campo* initiatives, there was much more political opportunity within Gomes’ government.

Nonetheless, as Maria de Jesus alludes, there was a third critical factor: the federal government. The role of the federal government in the construction of these four high schools was a theme throughout my interviews with both MST activists and government officials. For example, two government officials who were hired to oversee these high schools said, “The schools were constructed because of this federal support, and the mobilization of the social movements.” Similarly, in response to a question about why Cid Gomes constructed these high schools, MST activist Erivando responded, “Because the state had to pay very little, it is a federal program . . . The MEC was willing to build 11 schools in Ceará, and Cid said he would give 4 to the MST. It was his negotiation with us.” Thus, it was the *combination* of mobilization, a supportive government, and increased state capacity due to federal intervention that led to high levels of MST-state coproduction of public schooling in Ceará.

### ***Modern High Schools in the Ceará Countryside (2010-2011)***

The MST education sector chose two settlements in the semi-arid *sertão* region and two settlements in the coastal region as the locations for their four new high schools. Initially there were some conflicts with the regional educational coordinators (CREDEs), the local government bodies responsible for overseeing these schools. According to Simone Ramos de Brito, an MST activist who became the principal of a high school in the coastal settlement Máceio, “The head of the CREDE said he would not let the school be built in the middle of the nowhere (*mata*). It was supposed to be a beautiful school, and the CREDE did not want it in built in the settlement . . . but the governor said that the MST was allowed to decide.”<sup>305</sup> Another MST activist, Erivando, confirmed this arrangement: “It was our negotiation with the Governor, and the CREDEs could not do anything about it.” Thus, despite the protests of regional government officials throughout Ceará, four new high schools were built on MST settlements—some arguably in the “middle of nowhere.”<sup>306</sup> Two of these high schools began functioning in 2010, and the other two in 2011. Map 6.2 shows the names of these high schools, their location, the CREDE in charge, and the tea

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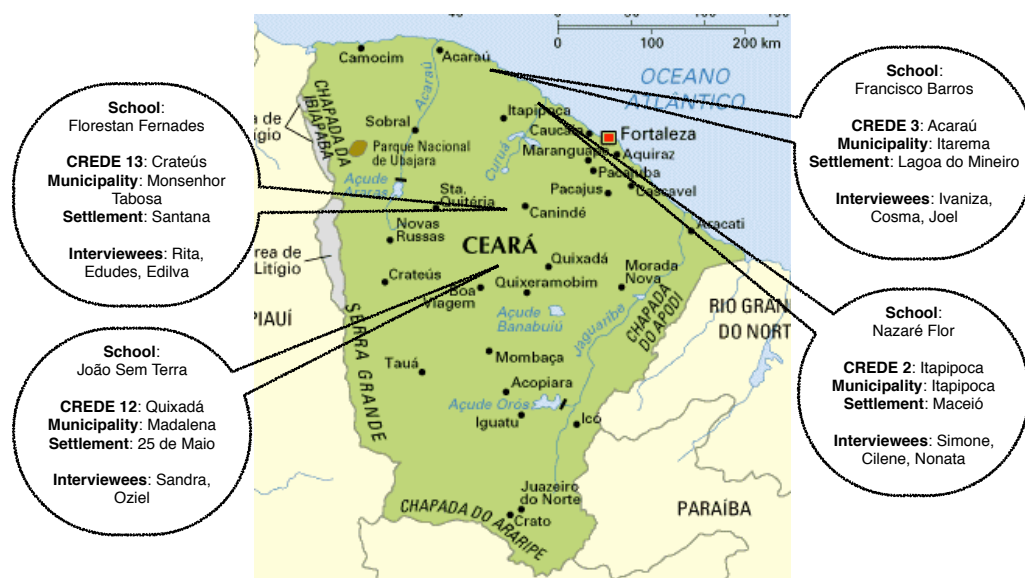
<sup>304</sup> All quotes from Erivando Barbosa, unless noted, came from an interview on September 15, 2011.

<sup>305</sup> All quotes from Simone Ramos de Brito, unless noted, came from an interview on September 12, 2011.

<sup>306</sup> In order to arrive to Florestan Fernandes High School, in the Settlement Santana, I had to ride for two hour on an extremely rocky dirt road, on the back of a motorcycle.

Map 6.2: *Escolas do Campo* on MST settlements in Ceará

### Geographical Location of *Escolas do Campo* High Schools in Ceará



CREDE = Regional Educational Development Coordinators  
Regional State Bureaucracy that oversees schools

### Infrastructure

When I visited the first of these four schools in September of 2011—Francisco Barros High School located in the northern coastal settlement of Lagoa do Mineiro—I was shocked at the infrastructure of the school. It was by far the largest and most well equipped rural public school that I had seen in my fourteen months of field research in Brazil. As a professor from the United States living in Fortaleza commented to me, the high school looked almost like a college campus.<sup>307</sup> There were five brand new brick buildings, with bright red roofs, spread out around a large outdoor area surrounded by a tall fence. There were a total of twelve classrooms in the school, spaciouly located across the five buildings. The classrooms were designed to have natural ventilation, with holes in the walls that allowed wind to blow inside, keeping the school cool. In addition to these classrooms, there was a computer room equipped with brand new computers, and a science laboratory with hundreds of new gadgets—most of which no one in the school had been trained to use at that point. Between each of the buildings green grass was growing, in contrast to the light brown sand outside the school. The school also had a gym area, with a basketball court, soccer nets, and stadium seats. In the middle of the five buildings was an area with bathrooms and a kitchen. Outside of the kitchen was an open space where students could sit and socialize. There was also a mini outdoor theatre, and an additional area with

<sup>307</sup> This was said by Bill Calhoun, the director of the School for International Training in Fortaleza.

benches for students to hang out—although doing this in the hot sun seemed almost impossible.<sup>308</sup>

Between September and November of 2011, I spent time in all four *Escolas do Campo* in Ceará. All of these schools had the same impressive infrastructure, with slight differences in the location of the different buildings. Throughout all of these schools there was also a noticeable MST presence: MST flags hung around the school, pictures of MST protests and marches, or posters denouncing agribusiness and encouraging agroecology. In two of the schools, the MST flag was hung from a tall flagpole in front of the school, next the Brazilian flag and the Ceará state flag. There were also student uniforms for each high school, which all included some type of design related to *Educação do Campo*. For example, in João Sem Terra High School the students' shirts said, "*Educação do Campo*, Our Right and the Responsibility of the State," with an MST flag in the front of the shirt. Unlike public schools in other parts of Brazil, where the MST flag is banned, the movement's presence was being embraced in these high schools. However, the Ceará government would never have had the capacity to build these high schools on its own. It was only the help of the federal government, which increased Ceará's financial and administrative capacity, that made the construction of these schools possible.

### *Selection of Principals and Teachers*

Even before the four *Escolas do Campo* were constructed, the MST education sector began a discussion about who would become the principals and vice principals of these schools. For the MST, it was extremely important that the leaders of the schools be MST activists with previous knowledge about the movement's pedagogical proposal. However, the selection of the school leaders also had to follow a bureaucratic process, in which the positions were announced online and anyone could apply. The MST decided on a creative solution to this dilemma: they asked to participate in writing the online job description. Although they could not require applicants to be "MST activists," the MST did convince the government to require applicants to have a bachelor degree in the "Pedagogy of Land"—the university program that the MST offered through PRONERA. Consequently, only MST activists could apply to these positions.

Joel Gomes de Nascimento, the Pedagogical Coordinator of Francisco Barros High School, explained: "Normally it is not possible to have a specific application process for one school. But since these were considered *Escolas do Campo* the Secretary of Education created an online application (*digital*) just for this school, and the MST was able to choose the material."<sup>309</sup> Simone Ramos, a long-time MST educational activist who became the principal of Nazaré Flor High School, elaborated on the specifics of this application process: "There was an application process for the school leadership, and Cilene and I were chosen. There was not a requirement that we had to be part of the MST, but we had to have studied the Pedagogy of the MST." Maria, the CREDE official overseeing Nazaré Flor High School, confirmed this story:

The one requirement for the school was that the principal had to have the Pedagogy of Land course, that was the one criteria. The government accepted this proposal because the principals should have knowledge about these rural areas . . . Simone is part of the MST, but she is also the principal. She was working in the community and applied to this position, and she also had the required Pedagogy of Land course. She was very enthusiastic. She has a good profile to be the principal.

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<sup>308</sup> Field notes, September 2011.

<sup>309</sup> All quotes from Joel Gomes, unless noted, came from an interview on September 8, 2011.

Maria justified the government's "choice" of Simone as principal by arguing that it was important for the principal to know about the *Educação do Campo* proposal. Although it was the MST state education sector that decided Simone should apply for this position, Maria understood herself as leading the process of selection. In 2011, all four principals and vice principals of the *Escolas do Campo* were active members of the MST education sector, and had taken the Pedagogy of Land degree programs in Ceará. These school leaders saw their job as implementing the movement's pedagogical proposals within these new high schools. In other words, the MST had succeeded in convincing the state to choose leaders for the *Escolas do Campo*, who were in reality following directions from the movement.

Once the principals and vice principals of all four schools were chosen, these new school leaders had a lot of autonomy in choosing the other school employees and teachers. In terms of the school employees—the janitors, cooks, and security guards—it was generally accepted that these applicants had to come from the settlement, to increase the social benefit of the school for the community. In the settlement Maceió, the community directly participated in the selection process, deciding that only people who had been dedicated to social struggle should be offered a job.<sup>310</sup> This criteria, however, was harder to apply to the teachers. The *Escolas do Campo* needed teachers specialized in every discipline, and the MST did not have enough activists with this training, certainly not activists living in these regions. Although the MST activist-principals were involved in the process of interviewing prospective teachers—rejecting antagonistic teachers—almost all of the applicants were from the cities and unaware of the MST's pedagogical proposal.

#### *School Mission Statements: Pedagogical-Political Projects (PPP)*

For each *Escola do Campo*, the MST education sector organized a two-year long process of debate and discussion about the goals of the school. The principals, vice-principals, teachers, community members, students, and local government officials were all part of this process, which included a series of general assemblies and dozens of smaller group discussions. Out of these debates the school mission statement, or what is referred to in Brazil as a Pedagogical-Political Project (PPP), was written. In 2011, these four PPPs were between 50 and 100 pages each.<sup>311</sup> The head of the MST education sector in Ceará, Maria de Jesus, described the process as long and tedious: "We formed education collectives in all of the settlements, and we did grassroots work to make sure everyone was involved in the discussion. We had huge debates about the PPPs, and we discussed how we were going to write them. In many settlements we are still discussing these PPPs." As this quote suggests, a major task of the MST education sector between 2009 and 2010 was organizing this participatory processes of writing these PPPs.

Joel remembered how the PPP process occurred in his school: "We began to have meetings with all of the people in the community, we talked, we advanced a lot. Marcos Gehrke [a national MST educational activist] visited and helped us a lot with the PPP . . . now we continue to have monthly meetings about the PPP, with everyone participating." Cosma do Santos, another MST activist-teacher at Francisco Barros High School, recalled both the participatory process and the constraints, "The process of writing the PPP was very democratic and participative, it was something we constructed together . . . but we could not incorporate everything we wanted. There is a certain schedule we had to follow, and the CREDE made sure

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<sup>310</sup> Interview with Simone Ramos, September 12, 2011.

<sup>311</sup> I was giving electronic copies of each of these PPPs.

we followed it.”<sup>312</sup> Simone, the principal of Nazaré Flor High School, remembered the length of the process, “We have been working on the PPP for three years, but it is not done yet. We are analyzing it, constructing it. The PPP has gone through so many hands, it went to the communities, we had a general assembly . . . our PPP is 100 pages long but it is still not ready.”

In my interviews with the government officials in the CREDEs, they also confirmed this participatory process. Maria, the state official in the CREDE overseeing Nazaré Flor High School, said, “We met with the community often to construct the PPP, to talk about how to prepare students to stay in the countryside.” Socorro Costa, another CREDE official, made a distinction between the process that took place in Francisco Barros High School and the other schools she oversees. “We recently had meetings for all of our schools for them to create their PPPs. The *Escola do Campo* did not participate, they are much more organized and were already in the process.”<sup>313</sup> These government interviews suggest that in contrast to most schools, where the writing of the PPP is a top-down government initiative, the MST education sector was driving this process for the *Escolas do Campo*—turning the writing of the PPPs into a democratic debate about educational purpose.

In the versions of the four PPPs I was given in 2011, they were each structured slightly different but had similar components. These included: 1) a statement of the social function and mission of the school, 2) the vision and values of the schools, 3) the social context of the region (often beginning in the early twentieth-century), 4) the history of the settlement, 4) a justification for the name of the school, 5) characteristics of the students, parents, and teachers in the school, 5) the conceptual and theoretical orientation of the school and, 6) the organizational structure of the school. In the latter two sections, the MST’s influence was particularly evident. For example, in the PPP for João Sem Terra High School, the section on conceptual orientation discussed an “alternative development model for the countryside, based in peasant agriculture,” “manual labor as central educational process,” and “social struggle and cultural as part of human formation”—three central aspects of the MST’s pedagogical proposal. In the section on organization, the PPPs went into detail on the “collective governance” of the schools. For example, the PPP for Florestan Fernandes High School describes the role of the student base nucleuses, the coordinating committee of base nucleuses, the teacher collective, and the general assembly—all components of governance that the MST implements in other schools across the country.

In order to facilitate these discussions of the PPPs in each settlement, the MST education sector published three “notebooks” that could be used by school activist-leaders to engage their communities in debates about implementing the movement’s educational ideas. The titles of these notebooks were, “Organizing Strategy for the Implementation of the *Escolas do Campo* of the MST”; “The Political-Pedagogical Project of the *Escolas do Campo* in the areas of Agrarian Reform of the MST: A Permanent Construction”; and, “One More Step Forward in the Implementation of *Escolas do Campo* of the MST.” The introduction to the third notebook states, “Like the notebooks that came before and those that will come after, this text is alive, in movement, and should be utilized to animate the collective construction of an alternative education project for the peasantry.”<sup>314</sup> This notebook had four sections: an evaluation of the collective construction of the schools up until that moment; a section reaffirming the basic

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<sup>312</sup> All quotes from Cosma dos Santos, unless noted, came from an interview on September 8, 2011.

<sup>313</sup> All quotes from Socorro Goncalves Costa, unless noted, came from an interview on September 9, 2011.

<sup>314</sup> Caderno de Trabalho de Base do Setor de educação do MST-CE, Number 3, p. 2.



principles of these schools' a list of tasks for the schools and MST education sector; and, a list of demands for the Governor (including the construction of four more high schools).

The MST also helped to organize a teacher training for the *Escolas do Campo*, which took place from January 17 to 21, 2011, in João Sem Terra High School. In preparation for this week of pedagogical learning a teacher training handbook was published, with the symbols of the Governor of Ceará and the MST next to each other on the first page—a clear illustrating of MST-state coproduction. The handbook began with an analysis of the “Brazilian Political Conjuncture,” including an overview of the recent presidential elections, a summary of the “interests of the dominant classes,” challenges of the Dilma government, and challenges for the working class. There were several articles in this handbook, a few by the MST national education sector, and the text of 2010 Presidential Decree on *Educação do Campo*. During this weeklong training, teachers studied these documents, participated in daily *mística* performances, listened to panels on the theoretical foundations of *Educação do Campo*, and discussed concrete attempts to implement these pedagogies in their schools.

The participation of the MST education sector in the construction of these schools—both through the process of writing the PPPs, the publication of educational materials, and the organization of teacher trainings—illustrate the high levels of MST-state coproduction that were developing in Ceará. But what did the schools look like in practice?

#### *MST Pedagogies inside Escolas do Campo*

In terms of the actual pedagogies being implemented inside of the *Escolas do Campo*, it might be too early to assess these practices. Two of the schools opened in the beginning of 2010 and the other two in 2011. Thus, my research, which took place in September and November of 2011, should be understood as an analysis of the beginning of this educational process. There were many difficulties inside all of the schools, such as teachers who were not yet familiar with the MST's educational proposal, a restrictive academic calendar, and a shortened school day that did not allow the MST to incorporate additional disciplines, such as agro-ecology. However, there were also some concrete steps being taken to address these issues, and other “signs” of the movement's educational proposal being implemented in these schools.

One of the clearest signs of the MST's presence was the incorporation of the movement's cultural practices. For example, in Florestan Fernandes High School I heard students shouting “call and response” protest chants as a form of taking attendance—a common MST practice at meetings and events. That day there was a group of us visiting from Fortaleza, and the students in the school prepared a *mística* for us—which incorporated the MST flag and other aspects of peasant culture. The *mística* ended with all of the children singing the MST national anthem, and several other songs about *Educação do Campo*.<sup>315</sup>

Another “sign” of the MST's pedagogies in these schools was the organizational structure, which included collectives of students, known as base nuclei.<sup>316</sup> In Florestan Fernandes High School I saw this organization as I visited classes and the students presented themselves through their base nucleuses. Rita Francisco do Santos, the principal of this school, explained that the process of organizing students into nucleuses was easy, because the settlement Santana is also collectivized and the students were used to participating in their parent's base nucleuses

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<sup>315</sup> Fieldnotes, November of 2011.

<sup>316</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, “base nuclei” are groups of several families, which are the most basic organizational unity of MST family or camp. In the school context, a base nucleus is a collective of students who discuss and debate the issues that arise in that school, and then send representatives to a class-wide or school-wide collective.

through the settlement's cooperative.<sup>317</sup> Other aspects of the MST's school governance structure, such as general assemblies, were also in place in this school.

However, not all of the high schools were as advanced in their implementation of these cultural and organizational practices. When I asked Cilene Ramos Cavalcante, the vice-principal of Nazaré Flor High School, about the aspects of the MST's pedagogies present in her school, she responded, "We have *mística*, but it is happening at a slow pace, we need more workshops to teach the students about what *mística* is, the idea behind *mística* . . . there are also base nucleuses of students, we are teaching students to be in a collective, but there are a lot of limitations and insufficient time to work with the students on this."<sup>318</sup> The settlement Máceió, where Nazaré High School is located, is not as collectively organized as the settlement Santana. As MST activist- Nonata Sousa explained, there were conflicts in this settlement between the MST and a local NGO, and the collective leadership fell apart.<sup>319</sup> Consequently, it is more difficult for the teachers at Nazaré Flor High School to implement the movement's pedagogies, because the students do not have previous experiences performing *místicas* and collectively governing their settlement.

In Francisco Barros High School, the MST activists were experiencing many of the same difficulties as Nazaré Flor. An additional problem this school faced was that enrollment came from several different local communities, not just the MST settlement. Joel explained, "We work with twenty-three different communities, indigenous, landless . . . our challenge is to learn how to work with all of these different subjects . . . it is difficult, we have to find common curricular themes that make sense for all of these groups." Although students were organized into base nucleuses, Joel admitted that, "They do not understand these groups yet. In some grades the nucleuses are working and in others we have a lot of work to do." Nonetheless, despite these difficulties, the activist-leaders of Francisco Barros were taking concrete steps towards implementing the MST's proposal in their school.<sup>320</sup>

Finally, two issues that all of these schools were dealing with was how to implement the "Diversified Part" of the curriculum and transition to full-school days (*tempo integral*), which would allow students to study all day as opposed to only in the morning or the afternoon. In Ceará there is legislation that allows every school to "diversify" its curriculum, justified by the 1996 Basic Law of Education. The proposal of the MST education sector is to have three additional disciplines in all of the *Escolas do Campo*, which would include: Organization of Work and Production Techniques; Projects, Studies, and Research; and, Communal Social Practices. Maria de Jesus, from the MST education sector, explained this proposal:

We want these themes of work, research, social practices to be part of the curriculum, and for all of them to be related to peasant agricultural practices . . . we want experimental gardens in each of the schools to teach youth about the land, to have them grow food and create a youth cooperative . . . but these practices are impossible if students do not have a full school day (*tempo integral*).

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<sup>317</sup> All quotes from Rita dos Santos, unless noted, came from an interview on November 24, 2011.

<sup>318</sup> All quotes from Cilene Ramos, unless otherwise noted, came from an interview on September 8, 2011.

<sup>319</sup> All quotes from Nonata Sousa, unless noted, came from an interview on September 13, 2011.

<sup>320</sup> There were other challenges in these high schools, typical of all rural schools in Brazil. These challenges include teacher and student absence, students not staying in their classrooms, students leaving school early, and delayed starts the school day.

The MST is trying to incorporate additional disciplines into the *Escolas do Campo*, which relate to peasant agricultural and social practices. However, in order to add these additional disciplines it is necessary for the students to be at school for longer than four hours a day.

Socorro, the government official overseeing Francisco Barros High School, commented on this topic: “One of their [the MST] big demands is full school days, and this is in a phase of study, because this will require additional costs in order to adapt this in the schools. The demand of professors will increase, and also they will need an agronomist. This means that there needs to be more dialogue with the state.” In the state Secretary of Education in Fortaleza, Olivia Haima expressed a similar sentiment, “Full school days is one demand the movements have, and they want it immediately; but we have to say maybe because we have to bring the proposal to the Secretary of Education to analyze. But today we are thinking that the proposal will be possible.”<sup>321</sup> The other government officials I spoke with in the CREDEs and the Secretary of Education seemed open to the MST’s proposal to have full-school days and disciplines related to peasant agriculture and culture. If the state does move forward with these proposals, the *Escolas do Campo* will indeed look quite different than other rural schools in Ceará.

### ***State-Society Relations in Ceará: Cooperation and Conflict***

The state-society relations that have developed in the process of constructing the *Escolas do Campo* in Ceará. In my interview with Nohemy, the director of the Department of Diversity, she talked enthusiastically about this project: “Today *Educação do Campo* is offering another conception of education, about the development of the countryside, about ensuring that people are no longer migrating to the cities.” I asked her specifically about the MST, and the positive aspects of the movement’s participation in the public schools. She quickly listed off four contributions of the movement: a strategy of mobilization to achieve their objectives; fighting for public schools and PPPs that attend to the needs of the communities; politicizing the teachers and principals so they are comfortable dialoguing with authorities; and increasing a general political consciousness of the right to an education different than urban areas. Nohemy clearly supported the *Educação do Campo* proposal, and at least some aspects of the MST’s involvement.

This general sentiment, that *Educação do Campo* is a necessary educational policy to prevent rural-urban migration—and that the MST is a key part of this process—was a theme throughout almost all of my interviews with government officials in Ceará. This suggests an overall shift in the Ceará state government towards embracing the MST’s educational ideas. Olivia, only hired to the *Educação do Campo* department in 2010, said, “When I first heard the phrase *Educação do Campo* I did not understand the difference between *Educação do Campo* and rural schools . . . but *Educação do Campo* is different, it is about a different conception of a school. It is a different curriculum and administration of the school.” While Olivia had previously been unaware of the *Educação do Campo* proposal, she now embraces it as necessary for students in the countryside. Maria, from the CREDE overseeing Nazaré Flor High School, also makes a distinction between rural schools and these *Escolas do Campo*. She told me that initially she thought the MST was wrong, that the schools in their communities should not be different from other school. “But now I understand and defend their [the MST’s] right . . . living with them and seeing their project, their philosophy of the school, how they care about the students. They are enthusiastic and convincing . . . rural education is having a school in the rural

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<sup>321</sup> All quotes from Olivia de Freitas Haima, unless noted, came from an interview on September 6, 2011.

areas, but the *Escola do Campo* is different, it is an alternative project and philosophy.”<sup>322</sup> While Maria did not initially support the MST’s involvement, now she acknowledges its necessity.

Similarly, Socorro from the CREDE overseeing Francisco Barros High School, had only heard of *Educação do Campo* a few months before our interview. Nonetheless, she said, “Of the seventeen schools I oversee, several are in rural areas, but only one is an *Escola do Campo*, the others are just rural schools . . . *Educação do Campo* is about creating subjects that want to work with the land, to bring technology to teach people how to work in the countryside, because right now there are people moving to the city who never go back to the countryside.” After this response I asked Socorro if she thought it was a good policy to have differentiated schools in the countryside. She said, “This is good because the Basic Law of Education says that every school has to have its specific characteristics. People in the countryside need to have *Educação do Campo*.” From Nohemy to the educational officials in the CREDEs, it now seems “common sense” that the *Escolas do Campo* should have a differentiated educational approach.

This does not mean that the state officials buy-in completely to everything the MST is doing in these schools. In fact, all of these government officials I interviewed expressed some degree of hesitation about the MST-state relationship. For example, although CREDE official Socorro started off saying, “*Educação do Campo* is necessary because of the diversity of the people, we need diversity,” she eventually admitted that, “We are also running a risk. We run the risk of having too much diversity . . . university courses only for people in the settlements, this is discrimination.” In my conversations with CREDE official Eliane Teixeira Brito, during her surprisingly calm and conflict-free visit to João Sem Terra High School, she was generally enthusiastic about the *Educação do Campo* proposal. However, at one point after a coffee break Eliane said in a whisper, “Sometimes I wonder if all of the students’ parents really identify with the struggle, if they really want all of this ideology . . . maybe they want to leave the countryside.”<sup>323</sup> Maria, the CREDE official overseeing Nazaré Flor, expressed her support of the MST while also affirming that, “In the end the school belongs to the state, it is not the MST who owns the school.” These are all examples of hesitation and doubt among the CREDE government officials overseeing these schools. This suggests that their support might not be entirely by their own inclination, but rather, a consequence of a top-down sanctioning of the MST’s participation.

The most concrete expression of these government doubts was Nohemy herself, the most important administrator of the *Escolas do Campo*. Nohemy was chosen for this position because of her history as an activist in rural areas, and her experiences working in MST settlements. However, despite her general support of the MST, doubts emerged throughout her interview:

They [the MST] try to have a dialogue, but what we understand is that the schools are not the property of the MST; the schools are for the people who are in these communities. The schools are a tool of the community, and the MST is welcome to participate, but there are limits to their appropriation of the schools, these are not schools of the MST . . . We realize the principals and some of the teachers are MST activists, we are aware . . . and in the PPPs the MST has a very strong force, but we need the community to appropriate this also. Not just the MST Education Sector . . . For example the MST is always saying they spent two years discussing the PPPs of the schools, and maybe people have been involved, but not everyone has participated . . . They have demands for the

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<sup>322</sup> All quotes from Maria (CREDE official, last name unknown), unless noted, came from an interview on September 14, 2011.

<sup>323</sup> Fieldnotes, November 2011.

Governor but we need to go through a process, we need to have more time to discuss the curriculum, to create something that is sustainable once the MST leaves.

I interviewed Nohemy for over an hour, and during the majority of the interview she expressed support of the MST's role pushing the *Educação do Campo* debate in Ceará. However, at different moments during the interview Nohemy also acknowledged some of her doubts, which were linked to a distinction she kept making between the "MST" and the "community." Despite the fact that three of the *Escolas do Campo* only serve students living on MST settlements, Nohemy draws a line between these families and the MST leadership.

This divide that Nohemy constructs in her interview is a very real and everyday reality for MST settlements across the country. Wolford has been at the forefront of illustrating the complicated and complex relationships between the MST leadership and the families living in areas of agrarian reform. These complexities are often related to "who gets the rights and ability to define who will represent the poor and how" (Wolford, 2010b, p. 10). While the MST's goal is for everyone who receives land to continue to be active participants in the movement, in reality this is a continual process of grassroots identity formation. If the MST wants to maintain hegemony within an agrarian reform settlement—what Gramsci refers to as moral and intellectual leadership—this involves a constant activist presence. Throughout this dissertation I have been referring to this process as the MST "political society's" ability to continually link the "civil society" living in areas agrarian reform to an alternative hegemonic project.

Nohemy's interview illustrates why the third factor on Table PIII.2—levels of MST mobilization in civil society—is critical. If the MST leadership is not able to maintain an organic connection to families living in its settlements, the movement's entire educational project could be in jeopardy. Government officials are already cautious about the MST's involvement. Nohemy's distinction between the "MST" and the "community" is an attempt to delegitimize the movement's participation. If the families living in these settlements revolted against the MST's educational project (as occurs in a case in Chapter 7), we can assume that their complaints would have sympathetic ears in the state Secretary of Education. For the moment this is not the case, the movement has cultivated a fair degree of moral and intellectual leadership in these communities, and thus has been able to navigate the doubts of these government officials.

As for the MST activists, they are also open about their skepticism of the state. Maria de Jesus explained the MST's position on its relationship to the state:

The MST does not want to replace the state. The state and the movement have to work together in process of popular participation, each group with their own responsibility, we all have a job. But one thing I do not accept is to be simply a benefactor of a program. We are subjects and we want to be part of the process.

Maria de Jesus believes that the state has a responsibility to the citizens of Brazil to provide certain services, such as public education. However, she does not want to simply "receive" these services. She thinks citizens have the right to participate in constructing and implementing government program. A few days later, at an education meeting, I heard Maria de Jesus exclaim in frustration, "A lot of people want *Educação do Campo*, but they want it without the MST."

In terms of the motives of these government officials, MST activist-principal Simone put these motives in a more structural perspective, "She [Nohemy] could personally be very open, but we see that because she is part of the state, even if she has a lot of good intentions, the

decisions are not with the individual, it is something much bigger than her.” Nonata, an MST activist-teacher in Nazaré Flor, is more skeptical of the state’s intentions: “Nohemy has been able to facilitate a lot of things for us . . . and Cid [Gomes] has allowed for concessions. But this is a political relationship he has with us, we ask for things and he always gives us half . . . The state always opens a door and closes three doors.” Furthermore, Nonata claimed, “the state officials do not actually understand the power that they are giving us.” Erivando, another MST education activist, agreed with Nonata’s sentiment—both in terms of the Governor’s ignorance and his opportunism: “Cid does not know [the power he is giving us]. He does not have any idea about what this means for the movement; for him this is important to get votes. He wants to make sure the movement does not hate him.” These interview excerpts illustrate that the skepticism between the MST and the Ceará state government is mutual.

### **Conclusions**

The MST-state coproduction in Ceará is most likely a combination of these opinions and perspectives. First of all, it is clear that the MST’s educational proposal would never have moved forward at the state level without the intervention of the federal government—first in 2005 and then again with the construction of the *Escolas do Campo* in 2009. The first moment began to sensitize Ceará state officials to the idea of *Educação do Campo*, but without financial and administrative support the proposal stalled between 2007 and 2009. Then, in 2009 the combination of slightly more political opening, large social mobilizations, and a new federal program, resulted in the construction of the *Escolas do Campo*.

It is possible that the previous Governor, Lúcio Alcântara, would have also supported the construction of public schools on MST settlements. However, it seems unlikely that he would have given such complete power to the MST to decide their location, choose the principals, and facilitate the process of writing the schools’ PPPs. It was Governor Cid Gomes’ left-leaning politics and supportive orientation towards the movement that led him to support the MST, and also restructure the entire state Secretary of Education to parallel the Ministry of Education. Currently there is a Department of Diversity, and within this department, an office for *Educação do Campo*. The five new high schools constructed with the MEC’s support were put under the administration of this *Educação do Campo* office, and state actors in this office acknowledge the right these schools have to a differentiated educational approach. Over the past three years, the CREDE officials overseeing the *Escolas do Campo* also began to accept this proposal.

Nonetheless, the gradual acceptance of *Educação do Campo* among state actors—whether partially forced or genuine—also came with a degree of skepticism about the MST’s continual involvement. Conversely, the MST was also skeptical of the government’s support. Activists assumed that the state actors were either being opportunistic, caving into popular pressure, or simply did not realize what they were doing. Regardless of intentions, these fragile state-society relations have succeeded in constructing four modern schools in the Brazilian countryside that do appear to be incorporating aspects of the MST’s pedagogical proposal, even in the first initial years. Despite many challenges and barriers to overcome, full MST-state coproduction has developed in Ceará. However, this cooperation seems contingent on one additional factor: MST activists’ ability to maintain the movement’s moral and intellectual leadership in the settlements, in order to prevent the state from creating a divide between the MST “leadership” and the families attending these schools.

## Santa Maria da Boa Vista, Pernambuco: Navigating a Clientelistic System

On May 4, 2011, I walked out of the mayor's office in Santa Maria da Boa Vista, a poor municipality in the far western part of the state of Pernambuco, in the semi-arid *sertão* region. I had just interviewed Mayor Leandro Duarte who is part of the traditionally right-leaning political party, the Democrats (DEM).<sup>324</sup> Leandro is the nephew of the most recent *coronel* (local political strongman) in the region, Florêncio Barros Filho, more commonly known as *Coronel Barrinho*. In our conversation Leandro explained the politics of the municipality: parties were much less important than the person. Leandro said that his supporters believe in his personal capacity to improve the municipality, which is why they elected him to office. An hour into the interview his secretary came in and whispered into his ear. I noticed Leandro's demeanor immediately change, and shortly after, the interview ended.

As I walked out of the office and onto the burning streets of the municipal center, I decided to call Jetro Gomes—Leandro's cousin and opposition candidate in the previous election. Jetro, who had recently joined the left-leaning Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) due to the influence of his sister, Maria Graciliano, was also the nephew of the deceased *Coronel Barrinho*. Jetro answered his phone right away. The courts had declared the previous election invalid: "Rebecca," he exclaimed, "let the people know, I have won and I am mayor."

My next meeting was with Adailto Cardoso, the activist coordinating the MST education collective in Santa Maria da Boa Vista. Adailto and I decided to attend Jetro's victory party at sunset. Over a hundred people were milling around outside, drinking beer, talking, laughing, and dancing. Jetro stood among the crowd shaking people's hands as they congratulated him for the victory. Adailto explained that people were declaring their allegiance to Jetro, in hopes of getting a municipal job. These supporters had to be careful, however, because the court verdict could quickly be overturned. Adailto pointed to several people on the outskirts of the crowd: "Those are Leandro's people noting who talks to Jetro. If Leandro stays in power, those who declare support for Jetro will be punished."<sup>325</sup> Adailto looked concerned. The MST, he said, had to be careful to stay out of these political disputes; otherwise activists would lose everything they had won in the municipality, most notably, a high degree of control over the municipal public schools.

### **Background**

Santa Maria da Boa Vista (henceforth, Santa Maria) is a municipality in the western part of the state of Pernambuco. Similar to Ceará, Pernambuco is one of the wealthier states in the poor north and northeastern region, contributing 2.3 percent of the national GDP, just slightly more than Ceará. The population of the state in 2010 was 8.8 million, the seventh highest in Brazil, with 80 percent of those being urban residents. This is in stark contrast to Santa Maria itself, which is geographically the third largest municipality in Pernambuco (three thousand squared kilometers), containing a population of 39,435 people, with 38 percent urban residents.<sup>326</sup> The geographical size of Santa Maria and its relatively small population makes it among the ten municipalities in Pernambuco with the lowest population density. This is most likely related to

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<sup>324</sup> The DEM party was founded in 2007 and was previously known as the Liberal Front Party (PFL). The PFL party was founded in 1985, and had a direct connection to the military dictatorship's political party.

<sup>325</sup> All information from Adailto Cardoso, unless noted, came from an interview on July 21, 2011.

<sup>326</sup> IBGE, 2010 Census.

its location in the same *sertão* region that encompasses much of Ceará, where a semi-arid climate and limited water making small-scale farming extremely difficult. In 2011, there was not a single major industry in the municipality.

When I was doing research in Pernambuco between February and August of 2011, there were hundreds of public schools located on MST settlements and camps across the state. However, none of these were administered by the state government. Rather, the public schools in areas of agrarian reform were all municipal schools, and the state government did not have any direct influence over their administration. Therefore, the relationship the MST state education collective had with the Pernambuco state Secretary of Education revolved around programs outside of the public school system, such as the adult education program *Saberes da Terra*.<sup>327</sup> This is also the reason why the outcomes in MST-state coproduction in Santa Maria are dependent on the relationships activists develop with the municipal government.

As the opening vignette of this section alludes to, ever since its founding in 1872 Santa Maria has been controlled by a system of *coronelismo*, or, a “form of chieftainship or leadership by big men, the heads of large, extended households,” who rule over rural areas as the dominant authority (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p. 87). While the democratic transition might have been a moment when political contenders could have replaced these traditional oligarchs—as happened in many parts of Rio Grande do Sul—this was not a region of intense political mobilization during the late-1970s and early-1980s. The MST itself only arrived in the *sertão* in the mid-1990s. Thus, in Santa Maria the same family has maintained power, and all of the mayors over the past century (except one, from 1993-1996) have been connected to this *coronel* lineage.

The most recent coronel in Santa Maria was Florêncio de Barros Filho, still referred to as *Coronel Barrinho* by local citizens and family. *Coronel Barrinho* was born in 1894 and had ten children with Judith Sampio Gomes—the sister of Jetro Gomes’ father. Between 1920 and 1960, *Coronel Barrinho* was the mayor of Santa Maria multiple times, with other close relatives assuming office in-between his terms. During the majority of the 1980s, *Coronel Barrinho*’s son, Noé Barros, was the mayor.<sup>328</sup> Noé Barros eventually became the patron of Leandro Duarte, supporting him in a 1996 campaign against Gualberto de Freitas Almedia—the rich landowner who had been the first (and only) person to oust the Barrinho family in Santa Maria.<sup>329</sup>

Despite the fact that basically only one family has held political power since Santa Maria’s founding, municipal rivalries are intense due to political splits between cousins who form opposing clientelist networks of support among citizens. The most recent iteration of these familial rivalries began in 1997, when cousins Leandro Duarte and Maria Graciliano joined together in the conservative Liberal Front Party (PFL)<sup>330</sup> (as mayor and vice-mayor respectively), to successfully defeat outsider Gualberto de Freitas Almedia of the PMDB. The cousins had a fight a year later, due to “differences in leadership style.”<sup>331</sup> Consequently, Maria decided to join the left-leaning Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) and support her other cousin, Rogerio Junior Mendonça Gomes, in the 2000 election. Rogerio successfully took power.

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<sup>327</sup> I collected a lot of data on state-level politics in Pernambuco, and specifically the relationship between the MST and the state surrounding this program. However, this data is not included in the dissertation.

<sup>328</sup> This information comes from the Santa Maria Department of Culture and Tourism (Histórico de Pessoas, Departamento de Cultura e Turismo, Agosto 2003)

<sup>329</sup> Interview with Leandro Duarte, May 4, 2011.

<sup>330</sup> The PFL became the DEMs in 2007.

<sup>331</sup> This was according to Maria Graciliano (Interview, May 2, 2011). Leandro Duarte claimed that Maria was trying to use him as a puppet in power, and maintain control for herself (Interview, May 4, 2011).



However, Leandro beat Rogerio again in 2004, winning his second, non-consecutive term. Then, in 2008, Leandro won a third term against Maria’s brother, Jetro Gomes, by 62 votes. Jetro filed for election fraud and came to power for twenty-one days in 2009, before Leandro had the ruling reversed. In May of 2011, a final court decision made Jetro the mayor once again.

It is hard to exaggerate the turmoil these familial rivalries cause citizens in Santa Maria. Since there are no industries, government jobs are the most stable means of livelihood for an average citizen. Thus, the mayor’s control over hundreds of municipal jobs is a political tool for maintaining citizen allegiance. Citizens declare their allegiance each election by wearing the “color” of the mayor they support, and people who stay *encima da mural* (undecided) are few and far between, as it precludes any chance of receiving a municipal job or other direct benefit. The school system is the biggest employer, with approximately 75 schools. Each time a new cousin takes power all of the municipality’s 75 school principals are fired and replaced with 75 of his supporters. Tenured teachers who cannot be fired are also affected, as their loyalty determines the schools they will teach in, some of which require a several hour daily commute.

Despite these challenges, a high degree of MST-state coproduction of the municipal public school system developed between 1997 and 2011 period. Therefore, this case demonstrates that even with difficult preconditions—such as low state capacity and clientelistic politicians—MST activists can learn to navigate the system and implement their pedagogical proposal over several different administrations. Table 6.1 illustrates the political transitions described above, and how they corresponded to MST-state coproduction of public schools.

*Table 6.1: Political Transitions and Educational Victories in Santa Maria da Boa Vista*

| <b>Years</b> | <b>Mayor</b>   | <b>Notes about mayors</b>   | <b>Signs of MST-state coproduction of municipal public schools</b>   |
|--------------|--|---|--|
| 1872 to 1993 | Various relatives of <i>Coronel Barrinho</i> are in power. | Noe Barros (the son of <i>Coronel Barrinho</i> ) is mayor for the majority of 1980s.                        |  |
| 1993 to 1996 | <b>Gualberto</b> de Freitas Almeida (PMDB)                 | First person outside of the <i>Coronel’s</i> family elected.  | First MST occupation in 1995 ( <i>Safra</i> ).   |
| 1997 to 2000 | <b>Leandro</b> Duarte and Maria Graciliano (PFL)           | Noé Barros supports Leandro; Leandro and Maria have a political split in 1998; Bernadete Barros Sec. of Ed. | More occupations, MST gets access to many new schools in the camps and new settlements; mayor sends teachers to MST courses.                 |
| 2001 to 2004 | <b>Rogério Junior</b> Mendonça Gomes(PSB)                  | Maria Graciliano key in the campaign, becomes Sec. of Ed. until Osmilda Brandão replaces her in 2002.       | MST receives permission to be active in the 11 schools serving MST settlements; two MST activists hired to oversee schools.                  |
| 2005 to 2008 | <b>Leandro</b> Duarte (PFL/DEM)                            | In 2007 the PFL becomes the DEM; Kátia Medrado Sec. of Ed for one year, then Neuma Vasconcelos.             | Two MST activists continue to be paid to oversee schools; <i>Educação do Campo</i> institutionalized and expands to 60+ other rural schools; |
| 2009 to 2012 | <b>Leandro</b> Duarte (DEM)/ <b>Jetro</b> Gomes (PSB)      | Leandro mayor for a year; Jetro for 21 days; Leandro back in power for a year; Jetro returns in May 2011.   | <i>Educação do Campo</i> supported under both administrations; MST has power in deciding policies for the 11 schools on settlements.         |

*\*I interviewed all of the mayors, vice mayors, and Secretaries of Education in Table 6.1 (except Noe Barros, who was no longer alive in 2011)*

### *Conceptualizing Clientelism*

Before analyzing this case, it is necessary to clarify how I am using the term clientelism in describing municipal politics in Santa Maria. The literature on clientelism and patronage is vast, interdisciplinary and disparate.<sup>332</sup> A survey of the literature shows that while there is a basic consensus about the definition of clientelism, there are disagreements about the relationship between clientelism, democracy and collective mobilization. Clientelism is generally understood as a “personalized relationship between actors, or sets of actors, commanding unequal wealth, status or influence, based on conditional loyalties and involving mutually beneficial transactions” (Lemarchand, 1972, p. 69). The key here is that it is “a reciprocal arrangement” (Powell, 1970; Scott, 1972) not completely coercive, “where the client derives some benefit from his subordinate role” (Hagopin, 1996). This relationship is not a one-time deal; it entails “mutual, relatively long-term compromises based on commitments and some kind of solidarity” (Roniger, 1994, p. 5). Fox (1994) draws a distinction between authoritarian clientelism, maintained through coercion, and a contemporary form of “semi-clientelism,” which garners consent through benefits and awards. In Santa Maria, clientelism functions through Fox’s *consent-based* form.

In the Latin American literature, an outpouring of studies appeared on clientelism in the 1990s, analyzing it in contrast to democracy, and asking why clientelism did not fall with the end of the dictatorships (Roniger & Guens-Ayata, 1994). In this perspective the “stubborn resilience of clientelist organization and practices” (Holzner, 2004, p. 223) represents the power base of “old regime elites,” indicates a failure of the democratic transition (Hagopin, 1990), a hindrance to “citizenship” (Fox, 1994), and a barrier to class-based organizing (O’Donnell, 1992). However, some scholars reject this dichotomy between clientelism and modern democratic practices, analyzing the phenomenon as resulting *from* an oppressive process of “modernization” (Guens-Ayata, 1994), rather than a “left-over” from an archaic past (Auyero, 2000). Auyero (2000) refers to clientelist practices as “problem solving through personalized political mediation,” the means of material survival for the poor.

In the (sparse) literature that directly analyzes the relationship between collective action and clientelism, it is clear that class-based organizing can exist simultaneously alongside clientelist political practices. For Escobar (1994), clientelism and peasant movements are two sides of the same phenomenon—*peasant political exclusion*—which forces peasants into both struggles for political participation and vertical clientelistic structures of state distribution. Burgwal’s (1995) ethnographic study illustrates that individuals can be involved in both types of political processes; they “play the game” to get benefits, while also organizing collectively. As Gay (1998) writes, people embrace clientelism as part of a popular political strategy, not due to “false consciousness.” Rutten (2007) refers to this as the ability to make strategic use of both a newly acquired “radical habitus” and an old “clientelist habitus.”

Auyero (2008) goes even farther to argue that there is often “relational support” between clientelism and collective action, in which ties of patronage function as “indigenous networks” (McAdam et al., 2001), a key ingredient to collective action. Goldfrank (2011b) makes the argument that radical democracy—defined as “inclusive, participatory decision-making processes” (164)—can be successfully implemented in clientelist political contexts. However, the outcome is “participatory clientelism,” in which resource allocation remains tied to partisanship. In the case of Santa Maria this relationship is different; clientelism neither serves as the “networks” of collective action, nor does participation facilitate an alternative way of

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<sup>332</sup> I use the terms clientelism and patronage interchangeably, as recent work has done (Auyero, 2008; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

distributing clientelistic benefits. Rather, local MST activists learn to *navigate* these relations, managing to win over politicians, principals, teachers and community members embedded in different and oppositional clientelist networks—what I refer to as the MST’s war of position.

The rest of this section will analyze the MST’s political activism in Santa Maria. I illustrate how activists *make use of clientelism* in distinct ways that are not always about subordination (Gay, 1998). In addition, I argue against the notion of clientelism as crude, static and timeless. In my own research the nature of society-state relations in a clientelistic context transformed in less than a decade. There was political learning on both sides that affected the strategies for collective action (on behalf of the MST) and strategies for political election (on behalf of the politicians). While MST activists refused to participate in politics when they first arrived in the region, “ideology could not compete with more material goods” (Escobar, 1994), and the MST began to negotiate with local mayors to receive benefits for settlements. However, unlike Escobar’s peasant groups, the MST activists never chose a “patron,” but rather, navigated both sides of the tense political conflict in order to maintain their educational proposal in public schools over several different administrations. This case illustrates that clientelist political systems—and the “subordinate role ideology continues to play” (Hagopin, 1990)—might actually *facilitate*, under specific circumstances, MST-state coproduction of public schooling.

### ***The MST’s Arrival in Santa Maria da Boa Vista***

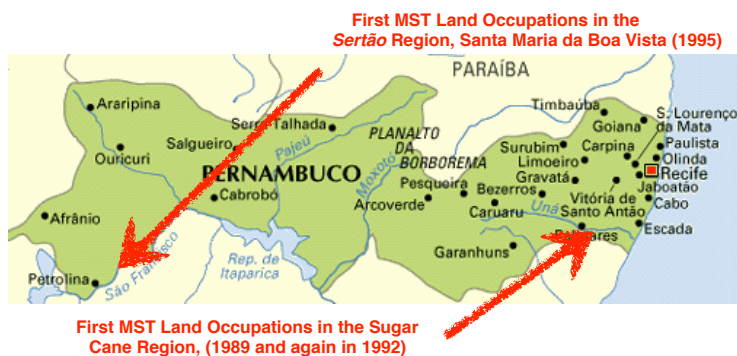
Jaimi Amorim, a short white male from Santa Catarina, has been one of the most important MST leaders in Pernambuco since the movement’s founding in Pernambuco in the late 1980s. As he explained in an interview, before the MST began organizing in the state activists analyzed its historical context—a rich history of peasant leagues, black resistance, and rural unionism. In 1989 the MST began organizing in the sugar cane region, and families won their first piece of land. However, this land was located in semi-arid *sertão*, where it was very dry and a large marijuana industry was present. After three difficult years in the *sertão*, in 1992, the MST decided to return to the sugar cane region to organize more land occupations. Jaime said, “That year was seen as a moment of taking back the agrarian reform struggle in Pernambuco.”<sup>333</sup>

It was only once the MST became stronger in the sugar cane region that the state leadership decided to return to the *sertão* region and begin organizing again. The first land occupation in the *sertão* of Pernambuco took place in Santa Maria da Boa Vista, in 1995, with 2000 families. This occupation resulted in the creation of the settlement *Safra* (Harvest). However, since only 220 families could be settled in this area, the other families went on to occupy more land in the region in 1996, 1997, and 1998. Within the next ten years fifteen MST settlements were created in Santa Maria, the majority of which are located on one road known informally as the “Highway of Agrarian Reform.” The settlement Safra is still referred to as “Mae-Safra” (Mother Harvest), because it was the first settlement in the region.

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<sup>333</sup> All information from Jaimie Amorim, unless noted, came from an interview on February 16, 2011.

Map 6.3: Location of first land occupations in Pernambuco



By 2011 there were 202 settlements in Pernambuco, with 14,000 families, and 143 other MST camps with 15,000 families still waiting for land access.<sup>334</sup> According to Jaimi, “the majority of these settlements were created between 1997 and 2002, because of the political pressure on Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Although Lula raised a lot of expectation for people, he returned to a model of development that was present for hundreds of years in Latin America, which relies on exporting primary material and monoculture production.” Due to Lula’s refusal to implement large-scale agrarian reform, the numbers of agrarian reform settlements have been fairly constant in both the sugar cane and the *sertão* region of Pernambuco since the early 2000s.

In Santa Maria, after these initial land occupations in the mid-1990s, the MST began struggling for additional public services, such as roads, agricultural assistance, and of course, public schools. Teresneide Varjão was one of the original members of the local MST education collective in Santa Maria.<sup>335</sup> When the first MST land occupation occurred in Santa Maria in 1995, she visited the camp and “fell in love” with the community, deciding to stay. Teresneide began to teach children on the camp to read, as her eighth-grade education made her one of the more educated people in the camp. In 1998, observing her potential, the state MST leadership sent Teresneide to the first MAG<sup>336</sup> high school program administered by the movement in the northeast, in Paraíba. This course was modeled off of the MAG courses in Rio Grande do Sul.

Several other emerging activists in Santa Maria were also sent to this course, including Erivan Hilário, who was only fourteen years-old but was already active in organizing educational activities in his camp. Through this MAG course, these activists learned first-hand about the MST’s educational approach. Erivan described the MAG course, “as a dream . . . it started my militancy, I learned to love teaching, I learned that I wanted to be a teacher, but not any type of teacher.”<sup>337</sup> This course was organized through the pedagogy of rotation, which allowed Teresneide, Erivan, and the other participants to spend several months a year in Paraíba, and the rest of the time in Santa Maria completing “community projects.” Both Erivan and Teresneide were given the task of organizing an MST education sector in the region.

<sup>334</sup> This is according to the MST’s own numbers in 2011.

<sup>335</sup> All quotes from Teresneide Varjão, unless noted, came from an interview on April 29, 2011.

<sup>336</sup> MAG stands for *Mágestério*, which is a teacher-certificate program (discussed in chapter 3).

<sup>337</sup> All quotes from Erivan Hilário, unless noted, came from an interview on October 25, 2011.

### *Coproducing Schools under Leandro Duarte of the PFL (1997-2000)*

Teresneide, Erivan, and the other members of a small but dedicated education collective in Santa Maria were relatively successful in getting schools built on MST settlements and camps during Leandro Duarte’s first term in office. Leandro was willing to participate in this process because the cost of construction was minimal and it improved his reputation. He explained:

After being elected I started to have a bigger relationship with the MST, and we began to improve the schools. I constructed schools in all of the settlements . . . In one settlement I turned the old master house of the *fazenda* into a school. I always took the opportunity to build a school, even if there was not the proper structure.

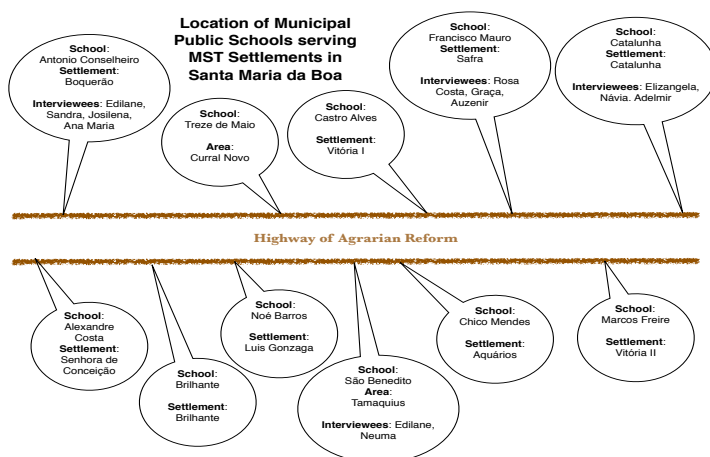
[RT: Did you take these actions because of the MST’s political pressure?]

No, it was not that, this was very much my choice.<sup>338</sup>

In contrast to Leandro’s sentiment in this interview, Teresneide said that these schools were built only after people took to the streets and engaged in contentious forms of protest. Sometimes the encamped families would construct a makeshift school themselves and then simply demand a teacher from the municipality. This situation is similar to what Burgwall (1995) found in his study of clientelism in urban settlements, in which politicians and settlers often disagreed over the meaning of exchange: politicians will stress their goodwill, while the poor will try to highlight that it was the result of collective action. Regardless of intentions, MST-state coproduction was developing as activists determined where schools should be built and mobilized community members to build these makeshift schools, while Leandro assumed these initiatives as municipal projects.

In 2009, there were 11 municipal public schools located in or next to MST settlements—all of them along the “Highway of Agrarian Reform.” Most of these schools were constructed during Leandro’s first administration. Map 6.4 illustrates the locations of these eleven schools.<sup>339</sup>

Map 6.4: Location of Municipal Schools on MST settlements in Santa Maria



<sup>338</sup> All quotes from Leandro Duarte, unless noted, came from an interview on May 4, 2011.

<sup>339</sup> My research focused on four of these schools; the people I interviewed are indicated in Map 6.4.

The presence of public schools on agrarian reform settlements was not a sufficient victory for the movement. These MST state leadership also wanted to transform the pedagogical approach in these schools. Luckily, Teresneide and Erivan were clear on what this pedagogical approach should look like, because they had just lived it for three years in the MAG course in Paraíba. In order to implement these practices in Santa Maria activists began dialoguing with state officials about the merits of the MST's educational proposal. For example, during Leandro's first term in office, the MST cultivated a friendly relationship with Leandro's Secretary of Education, Bernadette Barros. Bernadette—who had grown up in Santa Maria and knew many of these MST activists when they were children—was open to this dialogue. She said, “Their methodology was acknowledging that they were from a different reality and that we had to recognize this different reality. . . . I agreed, we cannot just force something on them . . . I participated in the meetings they held. I even went to Brasília with them for a national conference.”<sup>340</sup>

The conference Bernadette mentions was the I National Conference for a Basic Education of the Countryside, organized by the national MST leadership in 1998 with financial help from UNESCO, UNICEF, and the University of Brasília. This conference was a key moment that put the MST's educational proposal into the national spotlight. Bernadette's participation meant that she learned more about the MST's educational goals, and experienced first-hand the legitimacy these ideas were getting at the national level. Undoubtedly, Leandro heard about the prestige of this conference. The MST also organized contentious actions to support the movement's educational ideas. This combination of internal allies, protest, and national recognition convinced Leandro to sanction the MST's presence in the schools.

An additional struggle was convincing teachers to support the movement's educational proposal. Initially, the MST wanted to put their own activists inside of these schools. However, since municipal jobs in Santa Maria are in high demand, the MST could not simply request that activists replace the teachers in these schools. Bernadete explained, “The only conflict we had with the MST was about the teachers . . . the MST wanted their own teachers, but what would we do with the ones already in the system?” Faced with these constraints, the education collective had to engage in a long-term process of persuading dozens of teachers in their schools—almost all of whom were from the city—to become allies of the movement. The MST activists traveled to the schools every day, talking to teachers and offering their assistance. Teresneide recalled, “It was crazy, we would leave on Monday, come back late Sunday, wash our clothes, go off again.”

Through this process, Teresneide and Erivan slowly learned that in order to transform the public school system in Santa Maria, the MST could not openly discuss party politics. This would simply alienate the different groups that had a stake in the public school system—teachers, principals, parents, and community members—who were all deeply embedded and beholden to opposing clientelist networks. Rather than continually critique the local government, Teresneide and Erivan talked to all of these different groups about their educational proposal. Erivan explained this transition in the education collective:

In the beginning we had a relationship of fear with the teachers, we told them they *had* to teach about the struggle, and we asked the communities to evaluate the teachers when they were not around . . . Afterwards we began to understand that if this was a collective, what

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<sup>340</sup> All quotes from Bernadete Gouzagos Barros, unless noted, are from an interview on May 5, 2011.

were we doing evaluating the teachers without their being present? We began to mature a lot; we wanted to work with collectives of teachers in the settlements.

During Leandro's first term, MST activists interacted with teachers daily—regardless of which mayors they were aligned with—reflecting on their teaching, inviting them to teacher trainings, and discussing how to improve rural schooling. Many teachers preferred this support to the total isolation they had previously experienced. Consequently, the MST education sector succeeded in convincing many teachers of the merits of the MST's proposal. Josilena explained:

The relationship and opinion I had of the MST was a feeling of fear . . . I did not know the MST, I was scared of the way the MST acted. Occupying land for me was robbing land . . . but I was invited in 1997 to a camp of the MST to teach . . . I was not assigned to any other school yet, and I did not have any work . . . I decided to go, and the Secretary of Education brought me in a car to the MST camp . . . I was very much welcomed, the people there were collecting watermelons and I started to help them, they welcomed me, they said they wanted a professor like me . . . They asked me not just to teach there but to live there. Since I was renting in the city, and it was expensive, I decided to move to the MST camp. I could do my work and not pay rent. I went with my entire family.<sup>341</sup>

As Josilena's story illustrates, MST activists won the allegiance of many municipal teachers. However, it was the support of the Secretary of Education, Bernadete, which first convinced Josilena to teach on an MST camp. This legitimacy Bernadete offered the MST, as a "reformer" (Fox, 1992) inside of the state, was critical for the MST's ability to form this relationship.

Since her first contact with the MST in 1997, Josilena has become an active member of the MST education collective, attending dozens of MST teacher trainings (funded by the municipal government), and attending the first Pedagogy of Land bachelor degree program in the Northeast (funded through PRONERA). Because Josilena's family was an open ally of Leandro Duarte, the MST was able to convince the mayor to make Josilena the principal of the school Antonio Conselheiro during his first mandate. Despite this clientelistic relationship, Josilena participated in contentious actions throughout this period. She recalled, "One time during the government of Leandro there was a big protest to pave the Highway of Agrarian Reform . . . I decided to shut down Antonio Conselheiro and take the students to the protest . . . I do not know what I was thinking . . . afterwards Leandro called me and asked what I wanted for my family . . . I told him I only wanted him to keep an eye out for the school." In 2011, Josilena was appointed the head of an *Educação do Campo*<sup>342</sup> department in a bordering municipality, because she had become known for her work advocating for the MST's educational project.

Right before the 1999 mayoral election, cousins Leandro and Maria had a huge fight. Maria decided to join the Brazilian Sociality Party (PSB), and she convinced her other cousin, Rogerio Junior Mendonça Gomes, to join the party and run against Leandro. Despite Leandro's relative opening to the MST in the educational sphere between 1997 and 2000, the MST regional leadership supported the opposition candidate in the next election, Rogerio Junior, due to his

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<sup>341</sup> All quotes from Josilena, unless otherwise noted, are from an interview on May 11, 2011.

<sup>342</sup> The phrase "educação do campo" only began to be used in Santa Maria in the mid-2000s, after the *Educação do Campo* Federal guidelines were passed, the MEC created an office of *Educação do Campo*, and federal officials began pushing the *Educação do Campo* proposal at the subnational level.

affiliation with the PSB.<sup>343</sup> During the 1999 election year, Leandro cut off all dialogue with the MST and ended the educational initiatives he had previously supported. This increased the animosity between the MST and Leandro, culminating with a famous “bean” incident, in which Erivan threw a bag of beans onto Leandro’s feet. Erivan said his family thought he was crazy, “because everyone in the government had know me since I was child . . . they thought the MST had brainwashed me.” Rogerio succeeded in defeating Leandro in the 1999 election.

### ***Rogerio Junior of the PSB Takes Power (2001-2004)***

After Rogerio took power in 2000, the MST was rewarded with complete freedom to participate in the coproduction of the eleven schools located on MST settlements. Rogerio even allowed MST leaders to choose the principals—from among his political supporters. In addition, Two MST activists were hired to organize these educational activities. In practice, this allowed them to do all of the work they had previously done as activists, but now paid by the municipal government. The Secretary of Education, Osmilda Brandão, confirmed this decision: “We had two people from the MST that worked for the Secretary of Education. But they did not come to our office, they stayed and did the work that they had to do in the community.”<sup>344</sup>

Despite his support for the MST, Rogerio’s mandate did not represent a break from the traditional clientelistic politics in Santa Maria—his father was, in fact, the cousin of *Coronel Barrinho*. Rogerio Junior explained why he supported the MST’s educational program.<sup>345</sup>

After I took power, the MST became part of the administration—they helped to run the government. They began to make a lot of suggestions about education, and we invited them to participate . . . It was very practical. The MST education collective had already been working in the municipality for a long time.

As Rogerio states, the MST was already working in the schools when he came to power, and many teachers, both allies and enemies of Rogerio, were already vocal advocates of the MST’s educational goals. This grassroots support—in addition to the MST’s political support—convinced Rogerio to fund the MST’s educational proposal. Within this context, MST activists began implementing a range of curricular and organizational proposals that supported their struggle for agrarian reform in the countryside. For example, activists promoted participatory democracy, created teacher and principal collectives, helped incorporate generative themes (Freire, 2002) into the school curriculum, and encouraged students to do community research projects. They also incorporated manual labor, agro-ecological initiatives, and daily MST cultural practices into the daily school routine. Rogerio said, “The result of the MST’s work conquered all of the resistance.” In other words, the tangible outcomes of the MST’s educational practices were winning over the government.

The one issue the MST could not change was teacher placement. The teachers sent to the MST’s far-off rural schools continued to be Leandro’s political supporters, because Rogerio’s supporters wanted to be in schools closer to the city center. Consequently, there were deep partisan divides in the schools on MST settlements, with the principals the political appointees of Rogerio, and the teachers all part of the oppositional party. The MST became even more

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<sup>343</sup> Activists do not have control over settled families, but they can encourage them to vote certain ways. With 15 settlements of 100-200 families—in a municipality of 40,000 people—this is significant.

<sup>344</sup> All quotes from Osmilda Brandão, unless noted, are from an interview on May 4, 2011.

<sup>345</sup> All quotes from Rogerio Júnior Mendonça Gomes are from an interview on May 11, 2011.



convinced that it was *not* a good strategy to discuss partisan politics in schools, regardless of the movement's support for Rogerio's campaign. The MST continued to invite all of the teachers, regardless of political affiliation, to attend teacher trainings in the MST's state headquarters in the city of Caruarua. The friendships that formed during these weekend trainings facilitated teachers' respect for the MST educational project. As Teresneide explained, "The social movement created connections to the teachers that turned into friendships, which went beyond a political relationship." Through the MST's constant presence in the schools and teachers' participation in statewide MST courses, municipal school teachers aligned with both Rogerio and Leandro began supporting the MST's educational project.

### ***Leandro Duarte's Return (2005-2011)***

In the 2005 mayoral election Leandro beat Rogerio, winning a second, nonconsecutive term. The MST education collective was worried, given their previous support for Rogerio. Erivan, the same activist who threw the beans on Leandro, went to meet the mayor in his office. To Erivan's surprise, Leandro said that the MST could continue helping to oversee the eleven schools in their settlements.<sup>346</sup> As Leandro later explained in an interview, he had learned a vital lesson from the previous election about avoiding political conflict. His four years out of office allowed him to think, mature, and act more calmly. He agreed to let the MST participate in the governance of the eleven settlement schools. Rogerio also commented on this support: "Leandro is not stupid. He saw that working with the MST was offering some results. He saw that this work needed to be done, and he did not want to hurt his political relationships." Leandro even allowed the MST to choose the principals—as long as they were among his political supporters

Luckily for the MST, many of the teachers who had been working in schools on MST settlements during the previous four years were Leandro's allies, since Rogerio had sent them there as punishment. These teachers had spent four years in the public schools on MST settlements, attending teacher trainings and participating in the MST teacher collectives. Many of these teachers were new advocates of the MST's educational proposal. Elizangela, a principal in 2011 aligned with Leandro, explained this process:

I am no longer a teacher who just comes, teaches, and leaves. I have a very strong connection with the MST. And I see myself as a type of activist, I am part of the fight.

*[RT]: But the MST always defends the PT and PSB, and goes against Leandro, this does not affect your relationship with the other MST activists?*

It is exactly for this reason that they see me as different because I am part of the opposition. But I contribute more than others who are in the MST's party. Because I am in Leandro's party, but today Leandro has a strong connection with the MST as well, he lets teachers go to MST meetings and teacher-training . . . I know I am in this position as a principal for a while, but this position is not mine. I was chosen because I am a teacher and support Leandro, but also because I am linked to the MST, I wear the MST shirt.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Interview with Erivan Hilário, October 25, 2011.

<sup>347</sup> All quotes from Elizangela, unless noted, are from an interview on May 12, 2011.

When Elizangela first arrived to teach in an MST settlement, she had no previous experiences with the movement and was scared that activists would be unfriendly towards her. However, as she attended MST teacher trainings and learned about the movement's proposal she became excited about working with the MST education collective. She now identifies as an MST activist, while still being Leandro's political ally and confidant. She inhabits both a "clientelist habitus" (Rutten, 2007) and a "*sem-terra* habitus" (Kroger, 2011). Allowing for these multiple identities is critical: if the MST had tried to convince teachers to switch political allegiance, the movement would have created enemies. Instead, activists were able to define the movement's proposal as independent of party politics—an educational project concerned with creating quality schools—and therefore teachers on both sides of the political divide could identify with the MST's goals.

The MST's focus on winning over the teachers and turning them into promoters of the movement's educational and political project in settlements is part of the MST's war of position. As Gramsci writes, "There is not organization without intellectuals, that is without organizer and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people 'specialized' in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas" (Gramsci, 2000, 334). The MST's goal is for the teachers to become organic intellectuals of *Educação do Campo* in the settlements, garnering consent for the MST's educational project through a "philosophical elaboration of ideas."

During Leandro's next two terms in office there was a clear progression of the MST's educational goals: the MST flag hung proudly, the MST anthem continued to be sung, and teacher collectives met daily. Slowly, the predominant opinion teachers held of the movement began to shift. Another teacher, Graça Gomes, explains her personal transformation:

My vision was similar to everyone, I was scared and thought that this was an invasion, that the MST was just stealing land . . . My first experience with the movement was in 1997 when I went to an MST teacher training in Caruaru; I began to understand the movement in another way, my vision expanded. I went to other meetings. I go to *sem terrinha* [landless children] marches. I am connected to the MST and participating.<sup>348</sup>

By interacting with the teachers on a daily basis, and talking to them about the movement's political and educational vision, MST activists became "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 5) in these communities, giving the teachers a "homogeneity and an awareness of [their] own function" as teacher-activists supporting the struggle for agrarian reform.

Consequently, these teachers also became organic intellectuals, convincing other teachers to accept these ideas. the municipality to support the movement. A school principal in 2011, Auzenir Socorro, explained this process: "There are no teachers who resist the MST's pedagogy. There was a teacher who arrived and had never worked with the MST, and we talked to her and explained how the pedagogy works. We explained the education collective to her, and goals of the movement."<sup>349</sup> Teachers such as Graça and Auzenir have become strong advocates of the MST's educational project. However, they also continue to participate in the clientelistic system. As Auzenir admits, "Leandro says the principal is his eyes and ears in the community. We let him know if there are problems." When Jetro took office a month later, Auzenir was fired.

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<sup>348</sup> All quotes from Graça Gomes, unless noted, are from an interview on May 6, 2011.

<sup>349</sup> All quotes from Auzenir Socorro dos Santos, unless noted, are from an interview on May 6, 2011.

During this period the MST activists also implemented a participatory process in which community members, teachers, principals and students rewrote their school mission statements—Political Pedagogical Proposals (PPPs)—through a process of dialogue and debate. Although there were deep partisan divides between parents, teachers, and principals, activists helped schools and communities rise above these differences and participate in a collective process of defining educational goals. Leandro also maintained the practice of hiring two MST activists to oversee the eleven schools on MST settlements. This was facilitated by the fact that he could easily find dedicated MSTs activists within his clientelist network.

One of those dedicated activists was Rivanildo Adones, whose family had been a long time supporter of Leandro. In 2001, Rivanildo passed a teaching exam and was sent to the school Antonio Conselheiro as punishment for supporting Leandro. Rivanildo said, “I was surprised when I arrived, I did not accept that we had to learn the MST anthem, the protest songs . . . in the beginning I used to complain.”<sup>350</sup> Despite these initial concerns, however, Rivanildo began to appreciate the MST’s pedagogical support. In 2002, to his surprise, he was invited by the MST to enroll in a bachelor degree program in Rio Grande do Norte. Rivanildo jumped at the offer to receive a free college education, since he only had a high school degree. “I became enchanted, this course really affected me, and I wanted to be part of the MST, part of constructing a pedagogy for the countryside.” Rivanildo became an organic member of the MST, while continuing to support Leandro. This made him a logical choice for the job of overseeing the eleven schools on MST settlements during Leandro’s second mandate.

Several years into Leandro’s second term, the MST leadership suggested the creation of an *Educação do Campo* department. By this time, the federal support for *Educação do Campo* was well known across the country. Santa Maria would be the first municipality in Pernambuco with an *Educação do Campo* department, which would bring the town a lot of prestige. Leandro agreed to create the department, but he demanded it provide services to the entire municipality—sixty additional schools. Rivanildo was hired as the new head of this department. He claimed in our interview that, “It helped the MST that I had voted for Leandro. Because then Leandro was more open to them.” Certainly, the fact that many of Leandro’s supporters were advocates of the MST’s educational proposal was critical to the development of MST-state coproduction.

In July of 2009 I attended the first municipal conference on *Educação do Campo*, funded by Leandro’s government. All municipal teachers were required to attend. The MST education collectively organized the program, inviting national MST leaders and other proponents of *Educação do Campo* at the federal level. These invited speakers included Edla Soarez, who wrote the *Educação do Campo* Federal Guidelines that were passed in 2001, Ademar Bogo, a famous MST national leader and poet, Rubneuzza Leandro, the head of the MST state education sector in Pernambuco, and Ana Claudia Pessoa, a previous MST activist now heading the *Educação do Campo* department in the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). For three days the teachers of Santa Maria listened to these speakers, who lectured about capitalist exploitation, socialist alternatives, and the philosophical underpinnings of *Educação do Campo*.

There are many different perspectives on why Leandro supported these developments in Santa Maria during his second and third terms. Návia, a teacher in the opposition party, said, “If Leandro did not embrace this proposal he would have been hurt in the elections. If he talked bad about the proposal, then the MST would go out in mass against him . . . He saw in his second

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<sup>350</sup> All interviews with Rivanildo Adones, unless noted, are from an interview on May 6, 2011.

election that he lost because of this; he wanted to show people that he was different.”<sup>351</sup> In contrast, Rivanildo claimed that, “Leandro thought the MST’s educational work was interesting, he ended up agreeing with the people in the movement that it was a good proposal.” One of the Secretaries of Education during Leandro’s second mandate, Kátia Medrado, fell somewhere in the middle of these two perspectives: “Some people critique the MST, but it is not possible to ignore the MST, because they are very strong . . . We were able to maintain a peaceful existence . . . Leandro never felt threatened by the philosophy of the MST, because the preoccupation was to attend to the citizens, to see the whole human being.”<sup>352</sup> According to these perspectives, a combination of opportunism and genuine support convinced Leandro to support the MST.

In May of 2011, I asked Leandro himself why he funded the *Educação do Campo* seminars, given their overtly Marxist character:

The movement has its goals of agrarian reform . . . invasion, production and resistance, but after some time the MST realized the settlement was already done, and they could not invade more, they had to develop the settlements, not just in agriculture but also in education. . . It was our responsibility to offer people education, so we brought together these interests . . . I work with intellectual leaders of the movement, I bring them here to offer lectures to our teachers.

*[RT]: I know a lot of the intellectual leaders, and they are Marxists. Why are you financing these lectures when they do not support you during elections, and you are in a right wing party?*

I think it is an evolution on our part. I do not agree with the Marxist line, the more radical line of seeing the world. But also, I cannot create an island when the settlements have a relationship with the intellectual part of the MST. I did not want to create conflict . . . Because these people came to my municipality and came looking for land, for survival. They should not be penalized, or their kids, because their mayor disagrees with the Marxist line and wants to radically break with the MST and generate conflict . . . But every election we are going to be on different sides.

As many of the other interviewees alluded to, a principal goal for Leandro is maintaining peace and “equilibrium” in the municipality. Therefore, if letting the MST participate in the school system avoids conflicts, he supports these initiatives. He did not seem concerned that his political rivals also support the MST’s initiatives, or that the MST sometimes campaigns against him in elections. He describes it as an evolution on his part, the realization that it is better not to antagonize your enemies. He also appears to have some genuine sympathy for the MST’s proposal; he mentioned several times during the interview that, “I am very proud to be from the countryside, to be a farmer . . . we do not want people living the countryside.”

The MST also seemed to evolve during Leandro’s two mandates. In the 2008 election when Jetro ran against Leandro, the MST leadership did not openly declare the movement in support of either political candidate. The MST activists realized that gambling with “party

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<sup>351</sup> All quotes from Návia Liane do Nascimento Silva, unless noted, are from an interview on May 6, 2011.

<sup>352</sup> All quotes from Kátia Menolouça Medrado, unless noted, are from an interview on May 9, 2011.

politics” was not actually the most productive way to implement their educational goals in the school system. The head of the MST education sector in 2011, Adailto Cardoso explained:

Our hardest challenge was to win over the municipality of Santa Maria da Boa Vista, it was a process of struggle. What we have today is a result of a struggle since 1995. We did not win over the municipality one day to the next . . . The people we work with that are very affected by this political party question; it is hereditary, an issue that comes from our roots and is part of the culture of the municipality . . . But we have struggled and we have won over all of our principals. Through a lot of work. And the government might have the right to say a certain person cannot be principal because they did not vote for their party, but we have our own autonomy to not accept just anyone that voted for that party to enter our area. We have to reach a consensus.

As this quote shows, the ability MST activists have to implement their educational goals is not simple, it involves a complex compromise with local political officials. Adailto refers to the political party question as something hereditary in the municipality, part of the culture. Even for a dedicated MST activist “clientelist politics is taken for granted; it is normal (and normalized) politics” (Auyero 2000, 179). The MST must also work hard in the settlements to convince principals, teachers and community members to support these educational ideas. This does not happen automatically, it takes years of working with teachers, sending them to MST teacher-trainings, and being present in the schools. Over time, MST activists in Santa Maria have learned to navigate clientelism by neither replacing it, nor adhering to it. They are able to win over teachers and principals in different political parties and convince them all to support an educational project that is “independent” of politics. Through this process activists have been able to maintain their proposal in the school system over multiple political administrations.

### ***Role of Federal PRONERA Courses and MST Internal Capacity***

The MST’s war of position to win over the teachers, parents, and government officials in Santa Maria was necessary in helping to implement the movement’s educational project. In addition, changes in the federal context, which directly affected the capacity of the MST education sector, were also critical. As described in Chapter 5, in 1998 the MST oversaw its first bachelor degree program through the federal program PRONERA—the Pedagogy of Land course held in Rio Grande do Sul. Three activists from Pernambuco enrolled this course, and went to Rio Grande do Sul several times a year for four years. During one of their “community periods” in Pernambuco, these activists decided to implement the theories they were learning and help the Santa Maria education sector organize a collective of principals. The knowledge and experience of these three activists increased the capacity of the local MST education collective to do this work.<sup>353</sup> Then, in 2003, the first PRONERA Pedagogy of Land bachelor program in the Northeast took place, in Rio Grande do Norte. Several educational activists from Santa Maria attended this program (including Erivan, Josilena, and Rivanildo). The pedagogy of rotation allowed them to maintain their commitments to the education sector in Santa Maria. Erivan explained, “This was an important experience, because even though I went to the university I did not have to de-root myself or lose my roots. I could appropriate the knowledge from those places, and connect it to my community.” The MST activists enrolled in this program increased their capacity for implementing the MST’s educational proposal—by living it in practice.

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<sup>353</sup> Interview with Rubneuzza

Shortly afterwards, from 2005 and 2009, a PRONERA Pedagogy of Land bachelor degree program opened in Pernambuco, in the neighboring city of Petrolina. Dozens of young people from Santa Maria went to attend this program—ninety-percent of whom were not yet MST activists. For many of these students, such as Adailto Cardoso, this was a process of learning about the MST and what it meant to be a militant. Adailto said, “This was a transformative process for me. For months I saw MST activists talk in public, coordinate the sector of education, create collectives. I wanted to participate, and I hoped that the movement would indicate me for a job.” As the founders of the education collective in Santa Maria took on other tasks in the movement, these younger activists imbued the educational collective in Santa Maria with new energy. In 2011, Adailto Cardoso, Erlane Ester da Silva, and Ronaldo—all graduates of this course—were the head coordinators of the MST education sector in the region.

In the context of a low-capacity municipal government, the MST’s ability to offer these courses to their activists did not go unnoticed. Sydney Carvalho, a long-time Workers Party (PT) activist who became the Secretary of Education under Jetro Gomes, said, “The MST has become a reference, because they are very well articulated and organized. They have been able to access university courses in Petrolina . . . this is in contrast to the Santa Maria government that has not gotten a single public university course in our city.”<sup>354</sup> Leandro mentioned to me that he once, “asked the MST to go to the Ministry of Education and demand projects for our cities, for the schools in the settlements. They are closer to the president and can get a lot of good concessions from the party.” These statements from Sydney and Leandro illustrate that the MST’s ability to demand, develop, and implement educational programs impressed local government officials. This capacity made collaboration with the movement attractive to mayors of all political divides

Finally, in addition to facilitating these outside projects, government officials also saw the MST as increasing internal municipal capacity. As another Secretary of Education under Leandro in 2011, Neuma Vasconcelos, said, “One thing I observed when I became Secretary of Education is that the MST helped a lot with administrative issues. They would listen to problems in the schools and resolve them before they arrived at the Secretary of Education.”<sup>355</sup> Whether solving small problems in the schools, or negotiating federal programs, the capacity the MST has to implement educational programs is considered a benefit within a low-capacity municipality.

### ***Jetro Gomes of the PSB: Chaotic Transitions (2008-2012)***

In 2008, Maria Graciliano’s brother, Jetro Gomes, ran against Leandro for mayor. Although Leandro won the election by 62 votes and took office for his third mandate in 2009, Jetro issued a judicial process against Leandro, which he lost at the local level. The judicial process moved to the state level and Jetro won, bringing him to power in the beginning of 2009. However, this victory only lasted twenty-one days as Leandro convinced another court to rule that he could stay in office until the federal courts made a final decision. In May of 2011—while I was in Santa Maria doing fieldwork—the federal court made a final ruling in favor of Jetro.

The 75 public schools in Santa Maria universally suffered as a result of these political battles. As soon as Jetro took power in 2008, he fired hundreds of municipal employees, including all 75 school principals, putting his supporters in these positions. Jetro also punished unsupportive tenured teachers by sending them to far-off rural schools to work. When Leandro took office twenty-one days later, revenge was intense. Leandro fired all of Jetro’s supporters—including the new principals—and transferred his teacher-allies back to the schools in the city center.

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<sup>354</sup> All quotes from Sydney Carvalho, unless otherwise notes, are from an interview on May 2, 2011.

<sup>355</sup> All quotes from Neuma Vasconcelos, unless otherwise notes, are from an interview on May 2, 2011.

When Jetro came to power once more, in May of 2011, this entire political upheaval occurred once again: principals fired, teachers transferred, and the ex-Secretary of Education, Neuma Vasconcelos, punished with a menial position in a far-off rural school.<sup>356</sup>

When I spoke with the teachers and principals in the schools, everyone was openly critical of these transitions. However, unlike most public schools where these transitions caused extreme conflict, in the eleven schools on MST settlements these tensions were less acute. Auzenir, the principal of the school Francisco Mauro in the settlement Safra (when Leandro was in power) said, “The principals changing caused a lot of conflict in other schools . . . in our school there was not this conflict, we try to separate out politics from the school . . . the MST helped a lot, trying to focus on coordinating *Educação do Campo*.” Similarly Návia, principal of the school Catalunha (when Jetro was in power) said, “There were no conflicts here, some teachers changed positions, but everyone thinks of this school as their school, they do not bring politics into the school . . . Elizangela was the principal and now it is me, but this is a political question outside of the school and it is not going to change how the school functions.” Návia and Auzenir were aligned with opposing mayors during this period of transition, and they both talked about the difficulties the situation created in their school—with students not showing up and transportation for teachers stopped for an entire month in 2009. However, they also claim that the conflict between teachers and principals was a lot less intense in their schools. Despite the overtly *political* orientation of these two schools—with the MST anthem sung each day, courses on socialist struggles every week, and student participation in political protests each year—the teachers and principals in these schools consider themselves above party “politics.”

As for Jetro, in May of 2011, when he took office for a final time, he continued to advocate for the MST’s coproduction of the municipal public school system. I personally witnessed this process, as Jetro asked MST activists to choose the school principals, form teacher collectives, and organize the III Municipal Seminar for *Educação do Campo* in July of 2011. During this three-day seminar hundreds of municipal public school teachers participated in MST *místicas* and discuss socialist alternatives for the countryside. The invited panelists included long-time MST educational activists in Pernambuco—Rubneuza, Erivan, and Teresneide. Amidst an unstable political system, support for *Educação do Campo* has maintained remarkable stability.

### **Conclusions**

In Santa Maria da Boa Vista, MST activists never transformed the low-capacity and clientelistic political regime. The same family continues to stay in power and use the public school system as a clientelistic distribution of government jobs. Nonetheless, movement activists have successfully convinced each new mayor to let them participate in the public schools. They have also persuaded each new set of teachers and principals that cycle through their communities to be part of this educational project. Despite the rotation of principals and teachers every election—four times between 2008 and 2010—the MST has stayed a constant presence in the municipal public school system.

Over time MST activists have learned to navigate clientelism by neither replacing it nor adhering to it. Through a Gramscian war of position, activists have won over teachers and principals in different political parties and convinced them all to support an educational project that is “independent” of partisan politics. The mayors of Santa Maria seem flexible about the MST’s left-leaning and often socialist educational approach. However, it is highly unlikely that

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<sup>356</sup> Neuma Vasconcelos was placed in São Benedito, in the community of Tamaquis, one of the schools the MST oversees. I interviewed her both before (May 2, 2011) and after she was fired (July 14, 2011).

these mayors would be equally supportive if this educational program began to threaten other entrenched power relations in the municipality. This raises serious questions about if and when an educational strategy based on a war of position can link to larger political, economic, and social transformations.



## Chapter 7: Understanding Failure: Regional Barriers to School Transformation

### Rio Grande do Sul: High-Capacity Antagonism

Between 1996 and 2006, the combination of high levels of social mobilization, tolerant to supportive governments, and high state capacity allowed full levels of MST-state coproduction of the state public school system to develop in Rio Grande do Sul. This included the full coproduction of Itinerant Schools on MST camps and the more constrained coproduction of public schools on MST settlements. Even in the 2003 to 2006 period, when Governor Rigotto took power and there was a significant decrease in financial support for the Itinerant Schools, MST activists Elizabete Witcel and Marli Zimmerman continued to be hired by the state secretary of education to oversee these schools—with relative autonomy. This situation, however, would be radically reversed in the next administration.

#### *Yeda Crusius of the PSDB Takes Power*

During the early 2000s, a group of political actors publicly opposed to the PT and particularly to the previous government's relationships to social movements, began organizing within the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB)—a political party that was nationally strong but had never won an election in Rio Grande do Sul. During the 2006 election there were three candidates that ran for office, Governor Rigotto from the PMDB, ex-Governor Olívio Dutra from the PT, and Yeda Crusius from the PSDB. After a close first round of voting between all three candidates, Crusius beat Dutra in a second run-off election.

The PSDB was more than simply antagonistic to the MST. The government was openly dedicated to weakening the movement's presence in the state. Partially, this animosity toward the MST was related to the movement's historical connection to the PT, the main contender against the PSDB at the national level. For example, Mariza Abreu, who became the Secretary of Education under Governor Crusius, explained that she joined the campaign because she thought Crusius would be a more viable candidate against Olívio Dutra than Rigotto. She said, "I am against the PT, they are anti-democratic. I believe in addressing social inequality, and I see this as one of Brazil's biggest problems, but the PT has been abusing democratic institutions."<sup>357</sup> Mariza had strong connections to the national PSDB party, and she even wrote the educational proposal for PSDB presidential candidate, Geraldo Alckmin, in 2006.

In our interview, Mariza expressed disgust at the direction Rio Grande do Sul had moved in over the past decade. She said, "I refer to Rio Grande do Sul as the socialist soviet bolshevik republic of workers." Her opposition to left-wing politics in the state was similar to her position on the MST. When I first asked Mariza about the Itinerant Schools on MST settlements, she said, "Before you understand anything about the Itinerant Schools, you have to understand that the MST is a huge problem (*problemão*)." Mariza claimed that the movement had particular political objectives, and that the activists did not really care about agrarian reform. She was very critical of the Itinerant Schools, declaring that she "inherited" this already awful situation. She commented on multiple problems in the Itinerant School, including the fact that, "The MST did not let the Secretary of Education into the camps . . . and when they did, the teachers who were supposed to be teaching were never teaching, there were a lot of irregularities."

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<sup>357</sup> All information from Mariza Abreu, unless noted, is from an interview on November 1, 2011.

Regardless of these critiques, Mariza Abreu could not simply close the Itinerant Schools on her own—there was too much political spotlight on the issue. Instead, Mariza drastically reduced the number of hours that Elizabete Witcel and Marli Zimmerman could dedicate to overseeing these schools, and she also stopped meeting with the movement. Marli said that during the entire Crusius administration, Mariza Abreu only agreed to talk the MST one time—because a federal congressman had arranged for the meeting. Marli said, “Mariza treated us really badly, we were just going there to discuss ways to improve these schools, but Mariza ignored us. She said that the Itinerant School were no different than other schools and would get no more resources. It was a very hard and awful discussion.”<sup>358</sup> Although the government did not shut down the Itinerant Schools, the antagonism between the MST and PSDB was clear.

The tensions between Governor Crusius and the MST went well beyond education. Throughout the four-year administration there were multiple violent conflicts that occurred between the Crusius administration and the MST, with dozens of camps being disbanded and MST meetings broken up by the state police. On one of these occasions, in January of 2008, there was a meeting of hundreds of MST leaders in the settlement Fazenda Anoni. As MST activist Roberto explained, “there had been a protest at a plantation before this statewide meeting. Dozens of state police arrived at the meeting because they said a few objects had gone missing. A conflict broke out and several people were injured. More police confrontations occurred the rest of year. One online news source reported: “In one of the most forceful protests against the governor, organized by the peasant movement, more than 17 people were injured. On this occasion close to 400 military police from Tropa de Choque de Brigada Militar [the Rio Grande do Sul military police] were mobilized to subdue 3,000 protestors” (Costa & Dornelles, 2010).

These violent interactions occurred between the Crusius government and other social movements as well. For example, in a series of news articles the MST state leadership collected about the police violence that took place between 2007 and 2008, there were confrontations with the women’s peasant movement, teacher unions, rural workers, city workers, and with the movement of unemployed workers and street people. This packet of articles included accounts of hundreds of police confrontations between the state military police and social movements in Rio Grande do Sul, between 2007 and 2008. There were international and national repercussions to this violence, with the United Nations committee on Human Rights issuing a statement of critique in January of 2008.<sup>359</sup> Dozens of political officials in Brasília also condemned these actions. Yeda’s investment in the state police force also did not go unnoticed by conservative party members either. As Mariza Abreu commented during our interview, “one of the best actions Governor Crusius took was to raise the salary of the military police.”

### ***The Unusual Role of the Public Ministry***

Despite the clear antagonism between Governor Crusius and the MST throughout 2007 and 2008, it was not until 2009 that the Itinerant Schools were closed—and even then, these actions were not taken by the Secretary of Education. Rather, from 2007 to 2010 an alliance was built between the PSDB government and several lawyers in the state Public Ministry—a nonpartisan legal institution charged with defending citizens’ public interest. With the support of the state government, the Public Ministry filed a series of criminal charges against the MST, and out of these general investigations came a concern about the Itinerant Schools. I interviewed

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<sup>358</sup> All information from Marli Zimmerman, unless noted, is from an interview on November 21, 2010.

<sup>359</sup> “Brigadas Militares e Denúncias à ONU de atos contra MST,” January 17, 2008. ([www.midiaindependent.org](http://www.midiaindependent.org)).

three of the lawyers in charge of this investigation, all of whom expressed similar concerns about the MST and their presence in Rio Grande do Sul.

Luis Felipe Tescheiner, one of the lawyers in charge of the MST investigation, explained that the Public Ministry started this case against the MST in 2008, because there were complaints by large landowners about multiple illegal activities in the countryside.<sup>360</sup> The Public Ministry identified four locations in Rio Grande do Sul to investigate, where there had been recent conflicts—Pedro Osório, Coquerios do Sul, São Gabriel, and Nova Santa Rita. I asked Tescheiner why these locations were chosen. He said, “In one location there was a huge plantation and the MST invaded it and burned the agricultural machines and killed the bulls . . . then they returned to their camps so no one could find them!” Since the regular judicial system was not prosecuting the MST, it was necessary for the Public Ministry to do this on behalf of the citizens of the state. These investigations resulted in a one hundred-page document, published in June of 2008, which analyzed the “MST phenomena”—the history of agrarian movements, the emergence of the MST, the evolution of the MST, the international network of support for the movement, and then in more detail, the contemporary context in Rio Grande do Sul and the four municipalities that were the focus of the investigation.<sup>361</sup>

Throughout this report Zander Navarro is quoted—an academic who used to work with the MST and is now one of its biggest critics (Navarro, 2009). In the latter part of the report, there is also a section on the MST’s educational project. This part of the report states that, “The MST has implemented a parallel education system, over which public officials do not exercise power or control. The Ministry of Education does not even know where the schools under the design of the movement are located. And the state and municipal secretaries of education, although they sustain the schools, have difficulties convincing teachers not linked to the MST to enter these schools.” The report even quotes one of the MST’s own educational publications, which states that students should “be dedicated to developing a class and revolutionary consciousness.” This quote is used in the report to argue that the MST activists were imposing a “unitary ideology” on the children in these schools.<sup>362</sup>

The Public Ministry report garnered a lot of critique from the MST and the larger public. One of the MST’s lawyers, Leonardo Kauer, said, “It was baloney, very stupid. They put together a false report that there were guerilla training schools that were implementing a plan for a red revolution tomorrow.”<sup>363</sup> The ex-Secretary of Education under Olívio Dutra—Lucia Camini—was upset that the state education advisory board was not consulted in this report—only the Secretary of Education was interviewed.<sup>364</sup> This MST considered this report, along with several other parliamentary inquiry commissions (CPIs) in Brasília, representative of a new moment of the “criminalization of social movements.”<sup>365</sup> However, not everyone thought these were negative developments. One prominent academic, Denis Rosenfield, told me that, “The Public Ministry in Rio Grande do Sul was very courageous. They defended the law.”<sup>366</sup> In the

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<sup>360</sup> All information from Luis Felipe Tescheiner, unless noted, is from an interview on November 17, 2010.

<sup>361</sup> Public Ministry of Rio Grande do Sul Report, June 16, 2008.

<sup>362</sup> Public Ministry of Rio Grande do Sul Report, June 16, 2008, p. 46.

<sup>363</sup> All information from Leonardo Kauer, unless noted, is from an interview on October 25, 2010.

<sup>364</sup> Interview with Lúcia Camini, October 26, 2011.

<sup>365</sup> This moment of the “criminalization of social movements” was mentioned by dozens of people throughout my field research.

<sup>366</sup> Rosenfield is also known for his critiques of the MST. After this interview (October 4, 2011) he gave me a book he wrote, called *The MST: A Threat to Democracy*.

end, the report made several suggestions that had direct effects for the MST, such as increasing police security around some MST settlements, evicting families from other camps, and most polemically, the closing of the Itinerant Schools.

The Public Ministry could not have carried out these actions on its own. Tescheiner commented on the role that the PSDB administration played throughout these investigations, “Yeda was important because she controls the police force. For the Public Ministry to act, we needed the help and support of the police.” As this quote indicates, the repressive state apparatus (Althusser, 1984) was necessary to follow through on the Public Ministry’s recommendations. Tescheiner also talked specifically about the case of the Itinerant Schools: “The state supported this action, and provided a lot of information about the schools . . . illegality was evident, so we went to Mariza Abreu and she agreed. We went to her to verify if they had the conditions to put these students in other schools, and she said yes . . . this action was easy.” It was difficult to implement many of the recommendations of the Public Ministry, because long court cases against specific MST activists would have to take place. However, for the Itinerant Schools the criminal charge was against the state itself. Since the state government agreed with the idea of closing these schools, a court case was not necessary. Instead, the Public Ministry and the Secretary of Education signed a “Term of Commitment to Adjust Contact” (*Termo de Compromisso de Ajustamento de Conduta*, TAC), which confirmed that the state government would close down these schools. Gilberto Thums, the head lawyer responsible for writing the 100-page report, explained this process in more detail.<sup>367</sup>

We concluded that the Itinerant Schools must be closed because they serve as an instrument of alienation for the kids . . .

[RT: *But how did this process of closing the schools begin?*]

There was an investigation into the situation of the MST in Rio Grande do Sul. But this investigation was not about the schools; it was about the movement in general, the violence in the countryside, general violence in rural areas . . .

[RT: *And what was the role of the Secretary of Education?*]

There was agreement on the issue. We made contact with people in the Secretary of Education to find out if it was possible to close the schools. They said they no longer had control over these schools, and agreed this was bad.

As this interview indicates, the investigation of the Itinerant Schools was the result of a general concern about the MST’s presence in Rio Grande do Sul, not an educational assessment. In contrast to Tescheiner, who explained the case in a calm, detailed fashion, Thums was extremely open about his ideological position—against the infiltration of communism in Rio Grande do Sul—and his disapproval of the MST. Thums went to great lengths to convince me of the MST’s communist threat to society, referring to the private school the MST oversees in Veranópolis, which receives federal funding:

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<sup>367</sup> All information from Gilberto Thums, unless noted, is from an interview on November 11, 2010.

The MST will never end, can never end, because it always gets public funding . . . I consider this movement a terrorist movement . . . There is a school in Veranópolis, you are never going to enter there. These are schools of guerrilla training . . . It is very curious, these schools, how they function, because you will never enter them, they are isolated and closed . . . And these schools, sincerely, you have to know how to sing the national anthem of Cuba, it is very intentional teaching, directed, and there they learn techniques of guerrilla warfare . . .

*[RT: But when you say guerrilla techniques you mean arms?]*

I don't know. We do not have this information. But certainly! Like what happened in Vietnam, everything used in Vietnam to attack American soldiers these people use here. They learn these techniques to confront the police and learn how to invade a *fazenda*, and these schools continue functioning with public funding . . .

*[RT: Why doesn't the Public Ministry investigate the school in Veranópolis?]*

We would, but it is the jurisdiction of the federal Public Ministry, we are of the state. . .

*[RT: Why doesn't the federal Public Ministry investigate?]*

Because they do not want to do this investigation. Because the federal Public Ministry is also full of communists.

This interview excerpt is revealing for several reasons. First, Thums immediately assumed that I was critical of the MST, and that I had never been to the school in Veranópolis that he mentions—despite my explanation that I was a researcher studying the MST's educational initiatives. In fact, I had spent several weeks as a participant observer in this school (see Chapter 3). For anyone with any degree of familiarity with the region, Thum's accusation that military training was taking place in the school is factually incorrect. This school is not only located in the center of a relatively conservative city, but also attached to a municipal elementary school. If the MST activists were using the school as a training center for guerilla warfare the local community would have immediately noticed.

The description of the MST as an armed terrorist organization—and the characterizing of anyone supporting the MST as being communist—was an attempt to delegitimize the movement. The closing of the Itinerant Schools was not primarily an assessment of the quality of education in these schools, but rather, part of a larger attack against all of the MST's actions in the countryside. The MST activists I spoke with believed that this was a strategy to cut off any resources going to the MST in Rio Grande do Sul, in an attempt to weaken the movement.<sup>368</sup> As both Thums and Tescheiner described, once it was decided that the Itinerant School were a problem they went to meet with Mariza Abreu to explore the possibility of closing them down. Although Mariza had always been critical of the Itinerant Schools, it would have been political costly to close them, so she welcomed the Public Ministry's support. She explained,

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<sup>368</sup> Intereview with Ivore, Maira,

The end of this contract with the Itinerant Schools was an initiative of the Public Ministry. Which I thought was great (*ótimo*).

[Me]: *Why was it great?*

Because if it was us that had to make this decision, it would have been very questioned but because it came from the Public Ministry it was more legitimate, it was the Public Ministry that brought up the issue. . . . It was them that made the decision.

Due to the extraordinary public support the Itinerant Schools had received over the previous decade—even drawing much international attention from academic researchers (McCowan, 2003; Thapilyal, 2006)—the PSDB government had to work with the Public Ministry to legally close them down. As MST lawyer Leonardo Kauer commented, “The government did not have guts to close these schools themselves.” The Public Ministry also needed the government’s support. Tescheiner referred to the signing of this document as a “convergence of interests.” Interviews with these state officials all suggest that the attack against the Itinerant Schools was not about an assessment of the schools themselves. It was part of a larger attempt to weaken the MST’s influence in the state.

Luis Tescheiner, Mariza Abreu, and another lawyer in the Public Ministry signed the TAC agreement on November 28, 2008.<sup>369</sup> For these government actors, closing the Itinerant Schools was necessary because they were seen as contributing to the MST’s political goals, which at best was partisan and at worst “terrorist.” The decade-long period of state-society synergy and MST-state coproduction of state public schooling in MST camps was over.

### ***“Closing Schools is a Crime”: Mobilization Faces High Capacity Antagonism***

In response to these actions, the MST organized dozens of contentions protests to force Governor Crusius to re-open these schools. Despite the MST’s best efforts, the movement’s political strategy of social mobilization and party alliances had come to haunt them a decade later. Governor Crusius’s ideologically right-leaning administration, and her hatred of both the PT and the MST, led to a full-out attack on the movement’s educational proposal and a refusal to reopen the Itinerant Schools. The official closing of these schools, however, did not go as smoothly in practice. Elizabete Witcel described how many of families living in the camp defied this government decision:

Last year the state got rid of the diplomas and the recognition of the Itinerant Schools. They arrived at the camps with police and told the children they were not allowed to study. They asked for the names of all of the children and their parents. Some parents were afraid to keep sending their children to the Itinerant Schools, and they began to study in the cities. But the Itinerant Schools continued, the teachers have class and most parents refuse to send their children to the city schools.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Ministério Público do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, Termo de Compromisso de Ajustamento de Conduta, Procedimento Administrativo #16.315-0900/07-9, November 28, 2008.

<sup>370</sup> Informal conversation with Elizabete Witcel, June 13, 2009 (Field notes June 2009).

As Elizabete describes, despite the legal requirement to close down the Itinerant Schools, the families living on MST camps refused to shut them down. Despite the police intimidation, lack of school resources, and absence of teachers salaries, the schools continued to function.

While I was doing pre-dissertation research in Rio Grande do Sul in July of 2009—eight months after the TAC was signed—I was able to observe one of these schools functioning in practice. This camp was located near the settlement Fazenda Annoni, one of the oldest and largest agrarian reform settlements in Rio Grande do Sul. When I arrived, one of the teachers of the camp's Itinerant School, Cristiano Diaz, was waiting to show me around. As we walked around the muddy encampment, Cristiano told me that there had been a lot of financial difficulties with the school since Yeda Crusius took office, and that last year teachers went on a hunger strike because they had not been paid for nine months. However, Cristiano admitted, none of the teachers were there for money; they were doing this job as MST activists.<sup>371</sup>

Cristiano said that the official letter to close the Itinerant School came on February 10, 2009, earlier that year. The letter stated that the schools were inadequate and that the children would be sent elsewhere to receive a proper education. This was hypocritical, Cristiano said, because a lot of the reasons that were given about the schools being inadequate were because the Governor had stopped funding the schools. He said, "Ever since the schools officially closed down, the police would arrive and go from tent to tent, trying to register the children and force them to go to the city schools. There are about 5 or 6 parents from our camp that decided to send their children to the city . . . however, the rest find ways to hide their children when the police come." Cristiano said that there was a team of 8 teachers on the camp, most of who had taken or were taking the MAG high school course in the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC), in Veranópolis (the same school Thums mentioned in his interview). Cristiano first started teaching in an Itinerant School in another camp, when he started the MAG course at IEJC. Now he had been a teacher in this camp for two years, spending several months a year studying at IEJC and the rest of the time applying what he was learning in the Itinerant School.

In this camp, the Itinerant School only went from first through fifth grade, because of the lack of specialized teachers. There were approximately thirty-five to forty students in the school, but Cristiano admitted it was hard to keep track because students were often absent. "For example, today with the rain it is unlikely that a lot of students will come to school . . . it is very muddy and the children are living in tents far away." At 1:30 PM, Cristiano and I headed to the Itinerant School for his afternoon class. The school was very basic, made out of wood planks and thick black plastic. There were three rooms in the schools, one for kindergarten through first grade, one for second and third grade, and another fourth and fifth grade classroom. Cristiano was the fourth and fifth grade teacher. The students started arriving at the school one by one, some of them without shoes, walking through the mud. Cristiano said, "The way they are dressed they would never be accepted in the city school." In Cristiano's fourth and fifth grade class, only one young boy arrived. This did not seem to disappoint Cristiano, who immediately went inside the classroom and started teaching, telling the boy in an excited voice about the math material he had prepared. In another classroom, an older woman was working with three young children.<sup>372</sup>

According to the head of the MST state education collective in Rio Grande do Sul in 2011, Izabela Braga, there were nine schools that continued to function on MST camps

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<sup>371</sup> All information and quotes from Cristiano Diaz come from informal conversations with him on July 17, 2009. (Fieldnotes, July 2009)

<sup>372</sup> Field notes, July 2009.

throughout 2009.<sup>373</sup> The MST continued to record everything that was taught, and Elizabete and Marli would bring these reports to the local state coordinators office (CREs). However, Izabela said, the CREs were soon told by the Secretary of Education not to receive these MST activists. Regina, a state official in the CRE office in Santa Maria, explained, “After the TAC was signed, the MST came to the CRE because they did now want the schools to close down. But we had to close them . . . we notified the parents that their children had to go to other schools, but the classes still continued happening.”<sup>374</sup> Cicero Marcolan, the principal of the settlement Nova Sociedade that oversaw the Itinerant Schools, described these interactions from his perspective: “The CRE tried to force us to automatically enroll the students in other schools, but I refused because I did not believe in forcing parents to send children to certain schools. The authorities issued a criminal charge against me, and nothing came of it, but it was a lot of pressure.”<sup>375</sup> Through these scare tactics, the state government eventually convinced many parents and teachers to send their students to other schools. Elizabete and Marli were also given teaching positions in public schools on MST settlements, which took them away from their work coordinating the Itinerant Schools. Slowly, the teachers on the camps also became involved in other activities, in order to make a living. In 2010 Izabela Braga said, “There are still some informal educational activities on the camps, but the Itinerant Schools are now closed.” High state capacity allowed the Crusius administration to follow through on the closing down of the Itinerant Schools, even in this face of long-term resistance.

The eventual end of the Itinerant Schools did not mean that the MST stopped mobilizing around this issue. Throughout 2009 and 2010 there were dozens of protests concerning education in Rio Grand do Sul, with the theme: “Closing a School is a Crime.” These mobilizations were directed at both Governor Crusius and the Public Ministry. I participated in one of these large protests in October of 2010, during a statewide gathering of the *sem terrinha* (landless children)—the sons and daughters of families living on settlements and camps. After two days of educational activities on a settlement outside of Porto Alegre, hundreds of *sem terrinha* children piled into buses for a final march. We gathered in the city center, outside Porto Alegre’s public market. There was a lot of positive energy, with the young children shouting out:

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|---|--|
| <i>Que são vocês? / Sem Terrinha outra vez!</i> | Who are you? / Little Landless once again!         |
| <i>O que é que traz? / A vitória nada mais!</i> | What do you bring? / Victory nothing less!         |
| <i>Essa onda pega? / Essa onda já pegou!</i>    | Has this wave caught? / This wave already caught!  |
| <i>Para anunciar / Sem Terrinha ja chegou!</i>  | To announce / <i>Sem Terrinha</i> already arrived! |

We marched in two single file lines through the streets of Porto Alegre, with drums playing and the older MST activists dancing around and keeping the children animated. A big truck passed beside our march, with a loud speaker playing music. An MST activist announced that we were marching because shutting down schools is a crime. Eventually we reached our destination—the tall, glass building where the Public Ministry offices are located. We waited outside of the building for almost an hour, until two of children were allowed to meet with Maria Inez Franco Santo, the lawyer in the Public Ministry in charge of the Infant and Youth

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<sup>373</sup> All information from Izabela Braga, unless noted, is from an interview on November 24, 2010.

<sup>374</sup> Interview with Regina, CRE 8, on November 25, 2010.

<sup>375</sup> All information from Cicero Marcolan, unless noted, is from an interview on November 13, 2010.



department. MST activists Elizabete, Izabela, and Maria accompanied the children, while the rest of us waited outside, listening to speeches and singing songs about *Educação do Campo*.

Eventually the children came back outside, and another MST leader announced that the Public Ministry had refused to make any promises, and had been very careful about what she had said in the meeting. The only promise she made was to create a transition team for the new governor—Tarso Genro from the PT, who had been elected several days before—in order to inform the new administration about the situation with the Itinerant Schools. This was not a promise that the Public Ministry would reopen the schools, the speaker made clear. The protest ended by reading a letter the children had written during their three-day gathering:

We, the *Sem Terrinha* of the MST, come to the XIV State Gathering of *Sem Terrinha* with this phrase: “To Close a School is a Crime: *Sem Terrinha* in the Struggle for Education.” We are here to demand from this government agency that it guarantees access to quality education, respecting our reality in the countryside. After 13 years of the Itinerant Schools, the Governor Yeda, in 2008, with the Public Ministry, closed our Itinerant Schools, leaving more than 600 children without a school. This is a crime! We demand that the government fulfills the law: to guarantee quality education for all children, whether in the countryside or the city, respecting their reality . . . We are struggling for a piece of land for agrarian reform, and in this struggle the school has to accompany us. We struggle for schools of the countryside on our camps and settlements. A right is a right! We do not accept no as an answer! Itinerant Schools Now!

*Landless Workers Movement: for school, land and dignity  
Porto Alegre, October 13, 2010*

After this letter was read, we all stood up to sing the MST anthem, and then the children were picked up in buses to return to their homes on settlements and camps across the state.

The dozens of social mobilizations that took place in Rio Grande do Sul throughout 2008, 2009, and 2010, did not succeed in convincing the Crusius administration to re-open the Itinerant Schools. This was a situation where the high capacity of the state government—facilitated by its partnership with the Public Ministry—was detrimental to MST-state coproduction. The Public Ministry offered the state government legitimacy, and the state government offered the Public Ministry administrative and police support. Despite the high levels of social mobilization in the state, and the outpouring of support for the Itinerant Schools, MST-state coproduction could not overcome this *high capacity antagonism*.

This did not mean that the protests were irrelevant to the administration. Mariza Abreu said that the closing of the Itinerant Schools had a lot of repercussions. She explained, “There was a congressman from the PT, Marcon, who came and critiqued the administration a lot for what we had down, he was very public.” Gilberto Thums, on the other hand, said that the investigation had a personal cost for him: “I experienced a certain rejection from society . . . for example, I was giving a talk in Caixas do Sul and the MST found out and organized a protest, and the chancellor of the university cancelled the talk because he did not want bad publicity.” The Public Ministry itself had an entire restructuring after this investigation. Tescheiner explained, “If a new group was chosen to keep investigating the MST I would probably not be chosen, because the whole case was very hard on the agency.” Finally, it is also possible that these protests—and the support they received across the country—contributed to Governor Crusius defeat in the 2010 election, which brought Tarso Genro of the PT to power.

### ***Public Schools on Settlements Face Constraints***

In addition to the Itinerant Schools, the PSDB government closed approximately 200 other rural schools between 2007 and 2010. The closing of these schools reflected an ideological position that the government took, which prioritized the construction of schools in urban areas. Secretary of Education Mariza Abreu explained,

The population is leaving rural areas. It is concentrating in the cities . . . We need to open schools in cities where the population is growing . . . less schools in rural areas . . . this is the destiny of the world, to have 2 or 3 percent of the population in rural areas, with agro-business, and the majority of the population in urban centers.

While high state capacity had originally facilitated the MST's ability to access the resources necessary to implement the Itinerant School proposal, this same capacity allowed the PSDB to close down the Itinerant Schools—in addition to hundreds of other rural schools across the state.

When I asked Mariza Abreu about the changes she implemented during her time as the Secretary of Education, she said her biggest accomplishment was transforming the “model of governance.” Mariza said that the teachers' unions had always ruled the public schools, and that this created a bad environment for the students. “The logic of school administration always focuses on the teacher . . . my biggest change was to return control of the administration of these schools to the Secretary of Education.” In addition to re-centralizing decision-making power, Mariza implemented several other reforms, including teacher merit pay. Here is her justification:

Professors and principals are resistant to merit pay, but they have to be realistic, life is a competition. There is competition everywhere, either in the job market or to get into a university, this is the reality . . . Nature is competitive. In nature, the weakest species die off. The difference between nature and human beings is that we have laws that maintain basic conditions for the people who lose in the competitions.

Mariza's policy of centralizing power and taking away the autonomy of schools and teachers was based on a logic of competition between schools, and this logic directly affected MST-state coproduction of public schools on settlements. Elizabete Witcel, who became a part-time teacher in the school Nova Sociedade after the Itinerant Schools were closed, described these changes: “Yeda demanded so much bureaucratic paper work that it was hard to have time for the pedagogical questions; we were constantly behind in the paper work.”<sup>376</sup> Cicero, the principal of Nova Sociedade, described the situation as openly antagonistic: “The Secretary of Education does not attend to the needs of our school. We needed a new teacher to be assigned to our school, but it took a long time because we are the last school the Secretary of Education wants to help.” Carlota de Oliveira Amado, in the school Rui Barbosa near the settlement Via Mão, said that, “Olívio came from the perspective that schools were about human formation. Rigotto and Yeda, but especially Yeda, tried to transform the schools into preparation for companies. Carlota explained that there had been a lot of partnerships between her school and several local business, which were supposed to help the school, but only offered employee training to the students.”<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> All information from Elizabete Witcel, unless noted, is from an interview on November 15, 2011.

<sup>377</sup> All information from Carlota de Oliveira Amado is from an interview on November 22, 2010.

In the school Joceli Corrêa, in an MST settlement in Joía, Angelita Perin described the new difficulties her school faced offering alternative disciplines: “Before, our student collectives (base nucleuses) were considered an entire discipline, which worked really well because we had a lot of time to explain collective governance to the students . . . in this new government we are no longer allowed to do this. Our names of disciplines have to match the official record of the state. We no longer have time to dedicate to teaching about student collectives.”<sup>378</sup> The principal of this school, Adilio Perin, talked about the standardizes tests, “There are more standardized tests that students have to take now . . . Yeda has been very impressive, she is trying to implement a system of merit pay that they have taken from São Paulo, but this is a disputed policy because none of the teachers will want the bad students.”<sup>379</sup> Another teacher at this school, Rosangela, said, “Rigotto was more or less supportive, but then Yeda was much worse. This government does not allow teachers to go to workshops, trainings, everything is very limited.” Carmen Vedratto, an MST activist-teacher in a settlement near Livramento, said that she feels like a “fish out of water” in her school. “The principal of the school is very friendly with the head of the local CRE, but she does not cultivate a relationship with the community and the families . . . not a single parent was called to help plan the graduation.”<sup>380</sup>

Together, these interviews with MST activists and teachers working in public schools on settlements illustrate a range of barriers that developed for MST-state coproduction during the Crusius’ administration: an increase in bureaucratic paperwork, open antagonism, constraints in the school schedule, an increase in standardized tests, the imposition of teacher merit pay, fewer professional development opportunities, less community-school partnerships, and a general trend towards preparing students for the job market. There is a lot of research arguing that there has been a “neoliberal shift” in United States towards accountability regimes, privatization, and the narrowing of goals around “achievement” (Apple, 2006; Lipman, 2011). These developments in Rio Grande do Sul are representative of these policies in the U.S., and a general global trend towards more market-based school reforms. Apple (2006) argues that this market-based paradigm puts the entire idea of the public sphere into question by changing the common sense words we use to understand education. School reform is now dominated by a discourse of “standards,” “excellence,” and “accountability” (p. 43). The discourse of “competition” that Mariza Abreu uses to justify her attempt to “take back” the schools in Rio Grande do Sul fits squarely within these global trend. Although MST activists were able to maintain their positions as teachers and principals in these schools, this new educational paradigm is highly restrictive.

In January of 2011, after four years of the Crusius administration, the MST education collective in Rio Grande do Sul met at the Institute of Education Josué de Castro to assess the status of the public schools on their settlements. Representatives from all of the schools on 6.1 were present. Ivori Moraes, began the meeting by saying:

I want to remember two important points for our states. The closing of the Itinerant School in February of 2009, now two years ago, and the closing of 175 other schools by the Yeda government. Mariza Abreu, under the perspective that urbanization is inevitable and a worldwide tendency, said it was important to close down these schools, that this it

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<sup>378</sup> All information from Angelita Perin, unless noted, is from an interview on December 18, 2010.

<sup>379</sup> All information from Adilio Perin, unless noted, is from an interview on November 28, 2010.

<sup>380</sup> All information from Carmen Vedratto, unless noted, is from an interview on January 5, 2011.

is a global logic. Mariza accelerated this process, and Governor Tarso might slow it down now, but he also may not. We have to think about our schools in this new context.<sup>381</sup>

This introduction led into a daylong debate about how the MST would continue implementing the movement's educational proposal in their settlement schools.

Several themes came out of this meeting. However, the most pressing and common theme seemed to be the isolation that the MST activists in each of their schools were feeling. "We are dealing with the same issues, but we are not in communication," said Eliane Muller from the school Oziel Alves.<sup>382</sup> The teachers noted that this was their first time seeing each other that year, and that the activists in the statewide education collective never come to visit their schools and support their work. Regarding a school on the Uruguay border, Carmen said, "the biggest issue is the distance, there is a very long distance between us." Eliane Henrique Mendes from Nova Sociedade said, "someone has to re-articulate the education sector . . . it is question of planning and investment."<sup>383</sup> The teachers all spoke about the need for more statewide meetings, more seminars on *Educação do Campo*. While these types of statewide gatherings had been common during Olívio Dutra's administration, and even during Rigotto's term in office, the recent government had refused to pay for these seminars. The MST education sector had directly suffered as a consequence.

Furthermore, between 1996 and 2010, the MST education sector had invested the majority of its energy in the Itinerant School proposal, leaving the state public schools to MST activists inside of these schools.<sup>384</sup> This worked while there were supportive and tolerant governments in power that allowed these MST activists to have a high degree of autonomy. However, in the context of a high capacity antagonistic government—dedicated to a neoliberal educational paradigm—MST-state coproduction suffered. This meeting in January of 2011 was the MST's attempt to take back these schools. As one of the leaders in the national MST education sector, Rosali Caldart, explained at this meeting: "There is a necessity to articulate work between schools on settlements . . . we are forming a bad habit when we say we want autonomy. We want autonomy from the state, but we do not want autonomy from the movement. The schools should not be sovereign; the MST never defended this. We need collective discussions between our schools, in coordination with the movement."<sup>385</sup> Here Rosali is advancing the idea that activists in settlements schools across the state should be in a *collective* discussion about how they are implementing the MST's educational proposal. Whether the MST would prove successful in achieving this goal, however, would depend both on the nature of the next government and the MST's own levels of internal capacity.

### ***Tarso Genro of the PT: State Support with Low Mobilization***

In January 2011, as I was leaving Rio Grande do Sul to start my field work in the Northeast, Tarso Genro of the PT became the new governor. One of the first actions his government took was to reopen the Itinerant Schools, and to issue a statement against the closing of any more rural schools. Despite these seemingly supportive actions, it soon became clear that

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<sup>381</sup> All of the information from this meeting comes from personal observation of the meeting on January 15, 2011 (Fieldnotes, January 2011).

<sup>382</sup> All information from Elaine Muller, unless noted, is from an interview on January 17, 2010.

<sup>383</sup> All information from Eliane Mendes, unless noted, comes from an interview on December 5, 2010.

<sup>384</sup> This info comes from Ivori Morais, who was in the MST education sector throughout the period.

<sup>385</sup> Fieldnotes, January 17, 2011.

the Genro administration was driven by an anti-PSDB stance, rather than a concern with MST participation. It was a different historical moment, and with the PT in power at the federal level the party's dedication to participatory governance had waned (Goldfrank, 2011b; Hunter, 2011). Despite Governor Genro's nominal support of the MST's initiatives—a result of the left-leaning programmatic platform he had campaigned on—the movement was not invited to participate in the government's administration.<sup>386</sup>

I returned to Rio Grande do Sul in October of 2011 to collect data on these changes. Although some of the same government bureaucrats who had previously expressed their misgivings about the Itinerant School were still working in the Secretary of Education, there was a new leadership team coordinating at the top. One of these new coordinators was Nancy Perreira, an advocate of liberation theology who had worked with the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) for the past fifteen years. She had been connected to the struggle for *Educação do Campo* since the early 2000s, through her work with the CPT, and now she was the head of a new *Educação do Campo* department in the state Secretary of Education. She explained her perspective: “In order to have *Educação do Campo* there needs to be a general investment in rural areas, for example, you need rural development, cooperatives. It does nothing to support *Educação do Campo* without supporting these other initiatives.”<sup>387</sup> Nancy seemed to be an advocate not only of the *Educação do Campo* proposal, but also an alternative development model for the countryside. Nancy said that when Tarso Genro assumed office, the MST had given him a list of demands, including some for education. Nancy said she planned to respond to all of these demands. She also talked about the biggest victory of the administration: finding a legal flaw in the TAC that the Public Ministry had signed, and thus, allowing for the reopening of the Itinerant Schools. “It is a legal victory, even if we have not opened any schools yet”

After talking to Nancy, I was invited to attend one of the Secretary of Education's new working group, the “Working Group of the Countryside,” which was an attempt to bring different departments together in order to discuss the *Educação do Campo* proposal. During this meeting the small group of state officials discussed the federal government's new educational program, *ProNoCampo* (see Chapter 4). The working group agreed that this policy was going to provide more support for social programs in rural areas, not only schools. Another topic of debate at this meeting was Yeda Crusius, and the fact that her administration had shut down 310 rural schools (a different number than I had heard MST activists quote previously). Nancy said proudly, “The first thing that Tarso did was to say no to the closing of more rural schools.”

Another government official brought up an issue they were having with a rural school in a far-off municipality, which only had twelve students. The local CRE had requested to close this school, because there was a larger school in a city not very far away. For the next fifteen minutes this issue was discussed, and it was agreed that the school *could not* close because it would go against the general line of the government. “It would look bad politically to close this school!” “We have to take a position!” I had the immediate impression that these government officials were more concerned with maintaining their reputation, than ensuring that the twelve students at this school live and study in the countryside. The next hour was spent reading through a new public policy on *Educação do Campo*, which the Secretary of Education hoped to pass. It was a lengthy document with dozens of initiatives for educational projects in the countryside. I

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<sup>386</sup> Confirmed by interviews with multiple activists in Rio Grande do Sul (October 2011).

<sup>387</sup> All information from Nancy Perreira, unless noted, is from an interview on October 7, 2011.

wondered what the MST education collective would think about the proposal, and also, why there were absent from the meeting.

Unsurprisingly, the MST's perspective on these new developments is quite different from Nancy's outlook. I talked to Ivori Moraes in October of 2011 about the changes that had occurred in the first ten months of Tarso's government. He said, "The first thing to understand is that it was necessary for this government to negate the educational policies of the previous government. They campaigned openly against the closing of the Itinerant Schools . . . so when Tarso won he publically annulled the TAC, saying it was illegal . . . But the MST was not called to be part of this process. And the Itinerant Schools did not open . . . it was a good political action, but in practice it changed almost nothing."<sup>388</sup> Ivori said that there were several other good initiatives coming out of the Secretary of Education, but that the social movements were not being called to participate in this process. Izabela Braga, the head of the MST state education sector, agreed with this assessment: "The relationship with the government has been calm, but also very superficial. They think everything is perfect, but there is no way to go back to how it was, Yeda dismantled a lot."<sup>389</sup> As Izabela alludes to, the problem was not only with the Tarso government but also the fact that the MST itself was a lot weaker than it had been four years previously. There were now very few encampments in the state, with only a handful of families. This meant there were not even enough children living in the camps to merit opening a school.

The MST's lack of capacity to organize new land occupations was tied to several historical developments: the consolidation of the power of agribusiness throughout the state, the increasing cost of land, the government's refusal to implement agrarian reform, and the federal social programs that made it easier for people to survive living in the city. In addition, four years of an antagonistic government had weakened the MST in Rio Grande do Sul. Another member of the education collective, Maria do Carmo, had commented on this issue the previous year, even before Tarso Genro took office: "I get angry when people talk about how Tarso will fix everything, that he will reopen the Itinerant Schools. No, we will not have Itinerant Schools again until we have children in the camps . . . The fight for land is the most important action the MST can take."<sup>390</sup> In other words, the MST-state coproduction of the Itinerant Schools, with a supportive government but a demobilized civil society, was impossible.

Unfortunately, these external factors were not the only issues in Rio Grande do Sul. There were also deep divides between MST activists that were affecting the movement's ability to mobilize in the state. In the education sector, these divisions stemmed from a lack of resources. A lot of members of the education collective began to take on other jobs within the movement, where they had a more steady salary. On the one hand, Elizabete and Marli were government employees, and had steady salaries. They travelled to the camps during the day, but would always go back to their homes on their settlements in the evening. On the other hand, the majority of teacher-activists in the schools was making no money and was living full-time in the camps. When this issue was brought up at a meeting, a huge fight erupted, which was never resolved and left a lot of distrust among activists. At the end of 2011, Izabela Braga said she was the only person left in the education "collective" in Rio Grande do Sul.<sup>391</sup> However, in talking to Maria do Carmo about these conflicts, she made it clear that, "Although it might seem to be

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<sup>388</sup> All information from Ivori Moraes, unless noted, is from an interview on October 3, 2011.

<sup>389</sup> Second interview with Izabela Braga, October 11, 2011.

<sup>390</sup> All information from Maria do Carmo unless noted, is from an interview on December 26, 2010.

<sup>391</sup> Interview with Izabela Braga, October 11, 2011.

inter-personnel conflicts, the disarticulation of the education sector is not about these personal relations, it is a structural issue related to the entire movement.” She admitted that people were critical of Elizabete and Marli, “but the real reason they left the education sector was because there were less government programs, less money to support new educational initiatives.”

Finally, an even greater division was emerging within the statewide and national MST leadership. As Izabela explained, this divide was between activists who supported “production” (agricultural production on settlements), versus those that supported “massification” (direct actions). Izabela said, “One is where the money comes from, and the other is what sustains the movement, gives it life. These two sides are fighting.”<sup>392</sup> In November of 2011, these divides culminated with thirty-five MST activists leaving the movement, in a public letter denouncing the relationship between the MST national leadership and the PT government. Of these thirty-five activists, seventeen were from the MST state leadership in Rio Grande do Sul.<sup>393</sup> Given these internal conflicts and limited resources by the Crusius administration, in addition to four years of open state attack, the MST’s ability to engage in the social movement repertoires that had been key to its success during the previous PT and PMDB administration was greatly restricted.

## **São Paulo: Technocratic Hegemony**

The central-east state of São Paulo is the most populous and richest state in the country, with 41.3 million people in 2010 (95.6 percent classified as urban) and 33.1 percent of Brazil’s total GDP in 2008 (with only 21.6% of the population) (IBGE, 2011). In São Paulo, there are two conditions present that might make us optimistic about the possibilities for MST-state coproduction to develop: high levels of state capacity and significant MST mobilization in civil society. However, the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), in power in São Paulo since 1995, is openly antagonistic to the MST’s political goals in the countryside. The government in São Paulo has utilized a technocratic discourse of progress, development, and the scientific application of expertise to delegitimize movement participation, and prevent civil society involvement in schools. High state capacity increases the government’s ability to ensure compliance with official educational goals among regional state government officials.

Technocracy is a form of governance whereby “experts” in various fields, such as scientists and economists, rather than politicians or partisan interest groups, are in charge of policy making. However, critical literature on development has critiqued technocracy as a “politics of techno-science”—the re-orientation of the political economy based on a rationale of technical expertise (Mitchell, 2002). As Mitchell (2002) suggests, it is a “form of politics” which claims certain actors as experts and thus excludes others. The government officials in São Paulo express a belief that only “educational experts”—defined as people working within the state Secretary of Education—should be developing school curriculum and policy. Thus, MST activists are excluded from the educational realm. Despite activists’ attempts over the past two decades to gain a legitimate role in defining school pedagogy in São Paulo, they are not seen as legitimate.

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<sup>392</sup> Interview with Izabela Braga, October 11, 2011.

<sup>393</sup> “Carta de saída das nossas organizações (MST, MTD, Consulta Popular e Via Campesina) e do projeto estratégico defendido por elas.” This letter was signed by 51 social movement activists, 35 of whom were from the MST. It was sent out publically through various email list serves on November 22, 2011.

However, in contrast to Rio Grande do Sul, this exclusion does not seem to erupt in intense social mobilizations or violent conflicts. Rather, this technocratic hegemony has created a common sense belief among MST activists in São Paulo that the movement will never have influence over the state public schools. While the MST administers several “movement schools” in São Paulo,<sup>394</sup> and the state schools on MST settlements have some of the best infrastructure in the country, no MST-state coproduction has developed for over two decades.

### ***São Paulo and Agrarian Reform***

The state of São Paulo is the current location of the MST’s national office, and consequently, a stronghold where dozens of national MST leaders from across the country live and contribute to the movement. The MST first began to organize in this state in the second-half of the 1980s; however, it was only in the 1990s that the movement became a real force (Fernandes, 1996). Although the MST organizes in several regions of the state, it was in the far western part of the São Paulo, in the Pontal do Paranapanema, where the movement was most successful winning land access. This was a region that had a lot of properties that were considered *devolutas* (public domains, literally translated as “returned”) because the Portuguese had returned them to the Brazilian government at independence. However, through a historical process of land grabbing known as *grilagem*, elites created false deeds to claim these properties—often using dead crickets to make these documents appear old and authentic (hence the term *grilagem*, from the Portuguese word cricket, or *grilo*). The MST began organizing massive land occupations in this region, in order to pressure the state government—who the movement considered the legitimate owner of these properties—to redistribute this land to landless families.

Ondetti (2008) argues that in the mid-1990s the total number of families taking part in land occupations in Brazil increased, “mainly from the intensification of the MST’s offensive in São Paulo’s Pontal do Paranapanema” (p. 156). Tens of thousands of families participated in these occupations, putting pressure on the new PSDB governor, Mário Covas, to redistribute a significant portion of this land. This created a unique situation where much of the agrarian reform settlements in São Paulo are overseen by the state, not the federal government.<sup>395</sup> According to an INCRA official in São Paulo, there are approximately 250 state settlements and 115 federal settlements across the state.<sup>396</sup> Dozens of these settlements are located in the Pontal da Paranapanema. Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, a professor of geography who has recorded much of the history of this region (Fernandes, 1996), estimates that approximately 50 to 60 percent of these settlements are a result of MST-led land occupations.

Currently, São Paulo is the state with the highest rates of land conflict in the country (NERA, 2011). Fernandes described this as a huge contradiction: “São Paulo is more developed than other states, but at the same time it has 500,000 hectares of land *devoluta* (public domain) that is in the hands of large landowners, transnational corporations . . . São Paulo has the most modernized agriculture, and the most land conflict in Brazil . . . and this shows the models of development in dispute.”<sup>397</sup> Due to the dominance of agribusiness in the state, land is extremely

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<sup>394</sup> For example, the National School of Florestan Fernandes, created in 2005 in Guarana, São Paulo, is the location of national MST meetings as well as an official educational institution with affiliated faculty.

<sup>395</sup> The state agency that oversees these lands is the Land Institute of São Paulo (Instituto de Terras, or São Paulo, or ITESP).

<sup>396</sup> Interview with Cláudia de Arruda Bueno, October 21, 2011.

<sup>397</sup> Interview with Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, November 10, 2011.



expensive, and the state and federal government often use this fact as a reason to refuse to establish more settlements. However, the debate over agrarian reform in São Paulo is clearly about something more than the cost of land; it is an intense fight over the future development model of the countryside. It was in this context, in the mid-1990s, that the MST education sector began to coordinate activities across the state.

### ***A PSDB Stronghold (1995-2011)***

Ever since 1995, the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) has maintained control of São Paulo. The three main governors during this period were Mário Covas (1995-2001), Geraldo Alckmin (2001-2006; 2011-), and José Serra (2007-2010). The latter two governors have been the principal presidential candidates against the PT in 2002, 2006, and 2010. In other words, the PSDB stronghold in São Paulo is not only relevant for state politics, but national politics as well. During their presidential campaigns, both Alckmin and Serra were publically critical of the MST. In the 2010 election, Serra publically criticized the relationship between the MST and the PT, declaring that, “MST is a movement that is trying to accumulate forces for a revolution.” Serra critiqued all of the federal money that went towards the movement’s initiatives, and promised to end these relationships if he became president.<sup>398</sup> These types of statements indicate the antagonistic orientation the PSDB has towards the MST in São Paulo.

While I was in capital city of São Paulo, I was able to interview two of the ex-Secretaries of Education of the state, Roserly Neubauer da Silva (1995-2001) and Maria Helena Castro (2007-2009), in addition to several other education officials. The difficult process of setting up these interviews, in contrast to other states, is a good illustration of the intensely bureaucratic system in place. While in most states I was able to walk into the office of the Secretary of Education and immediately set up interviews, in São Paulo I had to submit dozens of official requests that had to be filed with protocol numbers and sent for a formal review. This process ended up taking weeks, with multiple follow-up visits required, to finally have my requests approved.

Once I began to interview government officials in the São Paulo state Secretary of Education, my biggest impression was that the MST is simply irrelevant to the educational debate. For example, although MST activists from São Paulo told stories of countless protests in front of the Secretary of Education in the late 1990s, Roserly Neubauer said that she did not remember the MST making any demands. In fact, she did not have much to say about the movement in general. This was in direct contrast to the ex-Secretary of Education in Rio Grande do Sul, Mariza Abreu, who would delve into a vehement critique of the MST and its educational proposal at any mention of the movement. Instead of talking about the MST, my interview with Roserly focused on the other changes she made during her six years as Secretary of Education, in particular, her work computerizing all educational data in the state. Roserly also talked about her time living in Chicago in the 1960s, when her husband was studying economics at the University of Chicago with Milton Friedman. Roserly is a strong supporter of the PSDB, and believes the party wins in São Paulo because of its “ethical responsibility and seriousness about its work.” Although Roserly made clear in the interview that no group should have influence over a public school, my questions about the MST did not provoke any anger or resentment. Just disinterest.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Globo, <http://g1.globo.com/especiais/eleicoes-2010/noticia/2010/07/serra-diz-que-mst-apoia-dilma-porque-podera-fazer-mais-invasoes.html> <accessed April 1, 2010>

<sup>399</sup> Interview with Roserly Neubauer da Silva, November 10, 2011.

My interview with Maria Helena Castro also did not spark any passionate debates about the MST and its role in the rural public school system. Maria Helena was dismissive of the idea that rural schooling should have any type of differentiated pedagogy, and she insisted that rural schools were following the exact same curriculum as schools in urban centers. She said, “The rural zones are small . . . the rural schools of São Paulo are usually close to the city, and they follow the same methodology of teaching, and curriculum, there is no different model for rural schools.” Maria Helena did mention two cases where rural public schools were somewhat different, the first being in the indigenous and *quilombola* (run away slave) territories, where communities had a lot of autonomy over their schools. The other case Maria Helena mentioned was the Pontal da Paranapanema, “near a zone of occupation of the Landless Workers Movement. Over there, almost near the border of Mato Grosso, in the Pontal.” I asked Maria Helena to elaborate on the case of the MST and she said:

In the Pontal you have an occupation of land by the MST . . . They came to ask to follow their own curriculum, their own orientation, their own pedagogy, so there we have the state curriculum . . . but the school has complete liberty to adapt certain techniques . . .

*[RT: So the governor São Paulo lets the MST act within these public schools?]*

It is not that we let them; in reality there is a strong relationship between the MST and the teachers. Do you understand? In the region of the MST they have some liberty to work with the schools . . . And why would we bother fighting with a small group? It would not do anything. If there was one thing I never saw as important, it was having a conflict with a small group that is very combative. We offer the MST schools, everything other schools have, but we are not going to sit and fight with the MST.

According to this interview, the MST’s educational approach might be present in some of the schools in São Paulo, however, this is a consequence of the movement’s relationship to the teachers, *not* because the state government sanctions these actions. Nonetheless, Maria Helena does not seem particularly concerned about these relationships. Her bigger fight, she said, was with the teachers’ unions. It was not worth her time to sit down and talk with the MST.

Sergio Martins da Cunha, the organizing director in the São Paulo State Teachers’ Union, confirmed this antagonistic relationship with the state government. He said, “For twenty years the trend in the state is towards treating schools like companies and having teacher merit pay and student evaluations. The system comes straight out of New York . . . all of these secretaries of education have been very authoritarian with us. They do not want teachers in charge, they want business managers.” As Sergio describes, there is an antagonistic relationship between the state government and the teachers’ union in São Paulo, and multiple strikes and protests have ended in police conflict. In addition, rather than look towards civil society for “expert knowledge,” for the past two decades these educational actors have travelled to the United States to learn about U.S. educational policies, and bring these ideas back to Brazil. This flow of knowledge has resulted in the implementation of standardized testing, merit pay and scripted curriculum across the state.

What does this mean for the MST’s educational proposal? In Rio Grande do Sul, the government’s attempt to implement this educational paradigm resulted in a vicious ideological battle between the movement and the state government. However, in São Paulo, with twenty years of one party in power, these educational reforms have become the norm. While there might

be a bitter battle between the teachers unions and the state government, the MST is basically ignored. According to MST activists I interviewed, every year the movement attempts to set up a meeting with the state Secretary of Education, but these initiatives are continually rebuffed. Edna Rosetta, a member of the MST education sector in São Paulo, said:

In 1996 we had a big march of *Sem Terrinha* (landless children) at the Secretary of Education, and we brought lots of congressional representatives, but the Secretary of Education never met with us . . . Last year we had another protest, and an assistant to the Secretary of Education met with us and wasted our time.

Edna said that in São Paulo, the education sector “makes it to the porch, but we are never allowed to enter the schools.” Edna blames this lack of access on the PSDB dominance in the state. Another educational activist in São Paulo, Rosemeire Serpa, blames the lack of MST participation both on the PSDB control and the neoliberal paradigm. “Governor Covas was much more open to discussion . . . but the MST’s reflection on this time period is that Covas’ goal was to keep us quiet so he could implement neoliberal policies. This was the first period when neoliberal policies were consolidated.” In the educational sphere in São Paulo, the long-term stability of the PSDB and the implementation of neoliberal educational policies, driven by ideals of technocracy and elite expertise, have excluded the MST from the educational debate.

### ***Capacity to Reject Federal Trends***

In addition to ignoring the MST, in São Paulo there is also a complete rejection of the educational policies promoted at the federal level. As described in Chapter 4, between 2005 and 2006 the Ministry of Education held seminars about *Educação do Campo* in every state of Brazil, except São Paulo. The director of the Department of Diversity in the Ministry of Education at this time, Armênio Schmidt, explained:

To share information we had, in all of the states in Brazil, state seminars of *Educação do Campo* . . . There was only no state seminar in São Paulo, the PSDB was in power, and the Secretary of Education thought that they did not need a seminar, because they said São Paulo no longer had any countryside.

According to this account, the Secretary of Education in 2005, Gabriel Chalita, refused the federal government’s request to have a seminar to discuss rural education policy. Based on a vision of São Paulo as an urban and modern state, Chalita argued that “rural education” was unnecessary. Despite São Paulo’s status as an important agricultural producer, the government claimed an education specific to rural areas was not necessary.

Antonio Munarim, who was the MEC official that reached out to the PSDB government during this period, went into even more detail about the state’s rejection of *Educação do Campo*. He said that he attempted to contact Gabriel Chalita multiple times, but he was never able to speak with him. Then Munarim saw Chalita at a national education gathering: “I talked to Chalita and I told him that I was having problems being put in contact with him. I told him we were having seminars about *Educação do Campo* in every state, and we wanted to have one in São Paulo as well . . . he was very affirmative, and said they would have one.” Chalita referred Munarim to a group of people in the Secretary of Education to communicate with, but this group never responded to his requests. No further action was taken. Munarim explained, “They never told us no, especially in written responses, but they found a way to make sure it did not happen.”

Consequently, the MEC had to organize a seminar on *Educação do Campo* in São Paulo without the participation of the state government.

The state government's refusal (however indirect) to host an *Educação do Campo* seminar is a result of several developments.<sup>400</sup> First of all, it is clear that the high levels of government capacity in São Paulo facilitated the state's ability to ignore these federal trends. Unlike the state of Ceará, which needed the financial and administrative support of the federal government, São Paulo could administer its schools without federal intervention. Second, this rejection of *Educação do Campo* is also connected to the government's understanding of São Paulo as a modern and urban state. As ex-Secretary of Education Maria Helena Castro said, "In São Paulo there is very little tradition with rural education. There has been an intense process of urbanization, and rural schools are like urban schools." This perception of São Paulo as "urban" is compounded with a technocratic belief about the benefits of market-based educational reforms, all of which directly contradicts the *Educação do Campo* proposal. Third and finally, these developments are also related to partisan politics. The PSDB in São Paulo is the biggest opposition to the PT at the national level. This creates a lot of antagonism, and unwillingness to come together to promote common goals. For these reasons, the proposal for *Educação do Campo* was never incorporated in São Paulo.

### ***Regional Coherence: The Pontal da Paranapanema***

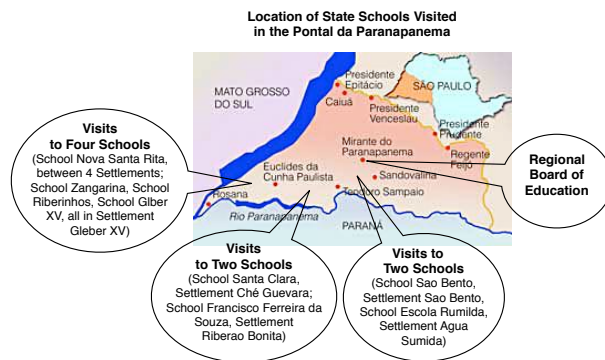
Despite the São Paulo state government's refusal to consider the *Educação do Campo* proposal and dialogue with MST activists, the state is large and dispersed, with schools in MST settlements far from the view of the state Secretary of Education. In order to assess the degree to which the official state educational policies reached rural public schools, I did research in the Pontal da Paranapanema, the MST's historical stronghold in São Paulo. This region has more than 5,000 families living in agrarian reform settlements, and around three dozen of public schools on these settlements, twelve of which include high school.<sup>401</sup> While in this region, I stayed with the current coordinator of the MST education sector. I interviewed four past and current members of the education sector in this region. I also visited eight different schools on agrarian reform settlements, and interviewed the principal and often the vice-principal of each of these schools. Finally, I had the opportunity to interview the state official that has been in charge of overseeing the state schools in this region for the past fifteen years—the appointed head of the regional Board of Education (*Diretoria do Ensino*). I also spent a day visiting schools with four women working in this government office. Map 7.1 illustrates the general locations of the schools I visited in the region, and the location of the regional Board of Education office:

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<sup>400</sup> I attempted to interview Gabriel Chalita several times, but was continually refused an interview.

<sup>401</sup> Informal conversation with Marcia, Field notes November 2011.

Map 7.1: Location of State Schools in Data Set in the Pontal da Paranapanema



There are a few important characteristics to note about these eleven schools. First, all of these schools had good infrastructure and were well equipped with textbooks and other educational materials. Unlike the schools in, which were often falling apart and lacking books, these rural schools had libraries, full kitchens, computer rooms, and the other infrastructure that exists in urban schools. In addition, the schools in São Paulo appeared to be more organized than other rural schools I had observed, with students starting class on time and teachers showing up each day to teach.

Secondly, unlike Rio Grande do Sul, Pernambuco, and Ceará, none of the principals of these eight schools were MST activists or had any affiliation with the MST. When I talked to the principals about the MST's educational proposal, they were either unaware that it existed, or in a few cases, disagreed that it should be present in their schools. For example, one principal I spoke with at the school Santa Clara had heard about *Educação do Campo*, and offered a good explanation about what it was. However, she said, "I do not agree with this pedagogy because children should be given the same opportunities here as in the city. They should not be forced to stay in the countryside."<sup>402</sup> The vice principal of the school Francisco Ferreira da Souza also articulated some aspects of *Educação do Campo*, such as the idea that students should be encouraged to live in rural areas. However, she made clear that no aspects of this pedagogy were present in her school.

This vice principal was also very critical of a previous principal of the school Santa Clara. She said that her students visited this school, and the principal had the children chanting MST songs, "It was ridiculous, they appeared to be a MST mini-army." However, this principal was

<sup>402</sup> Fieldnotes, December 2011.

soon fired. The principal that was mentioned—Elza Maria da Silva—is the only instance I heard of an MST activist taking charge of a school in this region. When I spoke to Elza, she had a story similar to other principals in settlements schools across Brazil: she was a teacher, fell in love with the MST's educational proposal, and was sent to a PRONERA post-bachelor degree program on *Educação do Campo*. When she became the principal of the school Santa Clara (which she called Ché Guevara, like the settlement), she began implementing many of these MST pedagogies. However, she was soon fired. Sebastião Canevari, the head of the regional Board of Education, said, "We could not keep letting her do those crazy things in the schools."

Nonetheless, besides these few negative comments and this past conflict, I did not hear many critiques of *Educação do Campo* when I visited these eight schools (even the day I visited the schools chaperoned by state officials). To the contrary, I even heard some principals and teachers express a *desire* to have a curriculum more relevant to the countryside, or specific professional development on rural teaching in rural schools. However, there was little to no concrete knowledge about *Educação do Campo* and the MST's proposal among the teaching body.

The students also seemed disconnected from the MST and the struggle for agrarian reform. Unlike other schools across the country, where students would sing the MST anthem at the start of every school day, the movement's presence in the life of these youth seemed absent. In the school Zangarina, as I was asking the principal about the MST, she stopped two students who were walking by to ask they thought about the movement. They said, "We do not have a relationship with the MST, we already have land." This response shows a disconnect between the MST leadership and the families living in these settlements. However, in many settlements it is the school that is at the forefront of this grassroots work with youth. In contrast, in this settlement the school was contributing to a *lack* of awareness about the movement.

When I asked the principal of the school São Bento about the MST, she talked about two MST leaders in the settlement who come and participate in the school, as parents. However, she said, they never talk about any type of pedagogy. She did not know what I was referring to when I said "the MST's pedagogical approach." In addition she said the students did not need to have a relationship to the MST because they already had land. In one classroom I asked the students who wanted to stay on the settlement after graduating. Only one of the thirty students said he would stay; the rest wanted to leave because of lack of opportunities.

I visited four of the schools in the Pontal with Dirceu Queiroz dos Santos, one of the previous heads of the MST education sector in the region. A few years ago, Dirceu passed a state teaching exam and now works in several schools near his settlement. Multiple times during our car ride, Dirceu mentioned the period in the mid-1990s, when the São Paulo education collective would go all over the state visiting schools and supporting teachers. However, he said, this never happens anymore. No one in the schools on the settlements knows anything about the pedagogy of the MST; they are not even aware that this debate exists. Mariza de Fátima da Luz, who was part of the MST education sector for many years before joining the national leadership, agreed with this sentiment. She said, "We talk about accompanying the schools, but this does not happen in practice, a visit once a week is not accompanying, you have to be present in the school . . . We have to be in the school and understand the school in its totality."

Mariza blamed this lack of participation on the current heads of the education collective in the region, who were involved in some specific tasks but did not systematically visit the schools. On the other hand, one of the current coordinators of the education collective, Everton dos Santos Osório, told me, "People think that Mari and I do not do anything, and that starts to hurt after a while. We use our own money, take our own time to organize these activities, and we only get

critiques, no encouragement . . . it is difficult to visit the schools because of distance, no money, and no infrastructure.” These interviews illustrate a disagreement about whether the main issue in the Pontal da Paranapanema rests with the coordinators of the education sector, or the regional support for these coordinators. Regardless of perspective, it was clear that the MST’s systematic participation in the state settlement schools in this region had not happened in a long time.

This lack of coordination did not mean that MST activist-parents had antagonistic relationship with the teachers in these schools. For example, at a regional MST meeting I talked to the two MST leaders who the principal of the school São Bento had mentioned. They said they had a very good relationship with the teachers and the principal in the school. “The school is open to us, they respect the fact that we were the ones that won the school from the state.” However, they explained, when the state opened the school they decided to use their own state curriculum, and the MST could not do anything about this. Neither of these two MST leaders mentioned any conflicts that occurred because the state had chosen to reject the MST’s pedagogy; they just explained that this was what had occurred. In none of the state schools in the Pontal that I visited—not even where Dirceu and was teaching—was *Educação do Campo* a topic of debate. At most, Dirceu implemented some interesting pedagogies in his own classroom, based on what he learned through the movement. However, there was no sustained attempt to implement the movement’s pedagogy in these schools. As Dirceu explained, “This is the job of the MST education sector, and they are not doing it.”

In one school I visited, I had the chance to speak to Luciano, a committed MST activist who had just graduated from a PRONERA bachelor degree program in Geography, from the State University of São Paulo. Now, he was teaching geography part-time in several different settlements schools in the region. I asked him about the MST’s presence in these schools. He said, “The MST is not inside any of the schools. I am a teacher here, but I am a polite (*culto*) teacher, I do not talk about politics, I just teach. The schools are very closed here, the MST is not in these schools; there is no room for discussion.” I pushed him on this issue, telling him that most of the teachers I spoke with seemed open to the idea of *Educação do Campo*. He disagreed: “Until what point?” He told me about a presentation that some graduates of his geography program had done in the school São Bento. Everyone loved their talk, but at the end of the presentation they did a *mística* and took out the MST flag. The vice principal immediately told them to put the flag away, that the flag was not allowed in the school because they do not allow politics to enter the school. Even though the presentation had been overtly political—a discussion about the political and economic context in the region—forbidden “politics” was defined as the inclusion of the MST’s flag.

At the state government level, this rejection of the MST’s pedagogy is even more apparent. In 2011, Sebastião Canevari had been the director of the State Teaching Board in the Pontal da Paranapanema for over 18 years. It was his job to oversee all of the schools that I visited in this region. He explained his position on the MST’s participation in these schools:

We talked with the MST, including some intellectuals that participate in the movement, and they told us they wanted a different type of curriculum. We said no and explained that we have a single curriculum, which is equal for rural and urban areas . . . I think that if you want to have a different curriculum then you can contract your own professors and run a school, and this would be your school. However, these are *our* schools and they are going to follow the curriculum of the state Secretary of Education.

Here the public-private divide is clearly drawn: the state develops the public school curriculum, and if civil society groups want to participate they can administer their own private schools. Sebastião was not alone in arguing for the need to follow one curriculum, designed by educational experts. Dozens of teachers I interviewed expressed this same technocratic belief.

This interview also illustrates the distinction that Sebastião makes between the families who live in areas of agrarian reform—whose children attend the state public schools—and the “intellectuals” in the MST who are advocating for this alternative educational proposal. The “intellectuals” to whom Sebastião refers are MST activists who have had the opportunity to take courses on *Educação do Campo* and learn about the MST’s pedagogical proposal. In other states, politicians see these “MST intellectuals” as organic to the movement. In the Pontal, Sebastião differentiates between “MST intellectuals” and “parents on settlements,” which facilitates his ability to disregard the MST’s participation in the schools. Although initially MST activists approached Sebastião multiple times, to suggest alternative practices for the settlement schools, the government refused to facilitate this process. Now the MST no longer requests his help.

Nonetheless, in the Pontal da Paranapanema actual conflicts between teachers, principals, and MST activists are few and far between. Although a few teachers expressed disdain for the movement’s pedagogy, most of them seem open to the idea of learning a new educational approach for rural schools. However, as the story of the MST flag in the school São Bento illustrates, it is unclear up until what point the MST’s pedagogical proposal would be tolerated. The MST’s current lack of educational initiatives in these schools also seems to be tied to a two-decade long uphill battle with local authorities. As another regional MST activist, Cido Maio, explained, “There was never a complete confrontation with the authorities, but the MST tried lots of different things in the schools and we kept getting blocked from these various initiatives . . . Little by little the MST also began to distance itself from the schools.”<sup>403</sup> Nonetheless, as Cido made clear, the schools themselves are a huge accomplishment. The government only agreed to build these large, well-structured, and well-resourced schools in settlements because the MST families mobilized and forced the state to build them. The high capacity of the São Paulo government, and the technocratic outlook that all schools should receive the same resources, facilitated this process. Now the MST has dozens of beautiful schools on settlements, more than any other state in the country, with no signs of the movement’s pedagogies.

### **Conclusions**

Unlike Rio Grande do Sul, the ability of the São Paulo government to prevent the MST from engaging in the governance of the school system was never a coercive and conflict-ridden process. Rather, two decades of continuous PSDB rule have cultivated a common sense understanding among São Paulo citizens that the state is urban and modern. A range of officials, from local bureaucrats to school principals and teachers, all expressed to me the need to have one policy for both rural and urban schools, to give students the opportunity to leave the countryside and participate in São Paulo’s urban economy. Interviewees agreed that parents (including MST activist-parents) should be involved in some school activities, such as organizing social events; however, the administration of the schools and the development of curriculum should be left to the “experts.” This technocratic vision of schooling in São Paulo and the implementation of statewide educational policies that emphasize standardized testing, teacher merit pay, and scripted curriculum, have solidified an educational hegemony that is fundamentally in contradiction to the MST’s educational proposal. Even though two of the ideal conditions for

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<sup>403</sup> Informal conversation, fieldnotes December 2011.



participatory governance are present in SP—high state capacity and a mobilized civil society—two decades of contrary policies have worn down the MST’s efforts. Now, even among MST leaders, the common sense in São Paulo is also that the MST will never enter the state public schools. This seems to be mostly correct, as long as the PSDB stays in power; however, it is also possible that the movement is fulfilling its own destiny.

## **Água Preta: Losing Moral and Intellectual Leadership**

This final case of Água Preta focuses on the third factor for MST-state coproduction in Table PIII.2: levels of MST mobilization in civil society. This factor can be assessed in two different ways, which are also directly dependent on each other. One assessment is the amount of social mobilization MST activists are able to organize in a certain state or region, and the second is the degree to which MST activists maintain their moral and intellectual leadership in agrarian reform settlements. Gramsci writes, “A social group can and, indeed, must already be a leader before conquering government power . . . even if it has firm control, it becomes dominant, but it must also continue to be a ‘leader’” (Gramsci quoted in Santucci, 2010, p. 154). In other words, moral and intellectual leadership must be continually produced and reproduced to maintain influence and power. If we conceptualize self-identified MST activists as part of Gramsci’s “political society,” then this third factor refers to the ability for MST’s political society to link the civil society in areas of agrarian reform to an alternative hegemonic project. This process is a constant dispute of power against other groups fighting to win this moral and intellectual leadership from rural populations.

Initially, in the case of Água Preta, a clientelistic government orientation and low state capacity created a situation in which mayors from both sides of the political divide were open to the MST’s participation in the public school system. This was possible because, first of all, the political struggle in Água Preta was not ideologically, and therefore, politicians were not programmatically opposed to the MST. Secondly, low-state capacity increased the perceived benefit of the MST’s participation in the schools, as the MST could offer professional development experiences that the municipal government could not offer on its own. However, as the MST lost its moral and intellectual leadership in agrarian reform settlements, MST-state coproduction became impossible.

### ***Background***

Água Preta is located on the far eastern side of Pernambuco, a ten-hour bus ride from Santa Maria da Boa Vista. Although Água Preta is only a sixth of the geographical area of Santa Maria, their populations are similar in size, with Água Preta containing 33,095 residents in 2010. Água Preta is considerably more urbanized than Santa Maria, with only 43.7 percent of the population (as opposed to 62) classified as rural (IBGE, 2011). A different world than the semi-arid *sertão*, Água Preta is in the heart of the sugar cane region, with an intense history of forced and semi- forced labor. On the bus to Água Preta for the first time, I passed dozens of miles of sugar cane plantations on rolling hills, which thrive in this area due to the extremely wet seasons, which also makes the city prone to flooding. In 2010, there was a huge flood in Água Preta that destroyed hundreds of houses located close to the river. When I visited the area in June and July of 2011, many of the houses that were still standing had signs of damage from this flood.

In this region many people plant sugar cane, however it is the owners of the sugar processing factories (*usinas*) that wield power. In the mid 1990s, the sugar cane industry was in crisis and many of these factories went out of business. This was the moment that the MST and

other rural social movements were able to organize dozens of land occupations, leading to the creation of more than thirty agrarian reform settlements in the municipality—the largest number in Pernambuco. This is also why Água Preta has been historically considered an MST stronghold in the state. By the mid-2000s, however, the agrarian context of the region had changed, as President Lula invested a lot of resources in reconstructing the sugar industry in order to produce ethanol. Consequently, sugar prices shot up and people in the region began growing sugar cane again—including the families living on agrarian reform settlements. During the previous decade, MST activists had convinced many of these small farmers to diversify their crops; as soon as sugar prices skyrocketed, these alternative initiatives were abandoned.

The MST leadership is openly critical of this investment in sugar cane, as it is a crop that contributes to the primary export model in Brazil. Nonetheless, as MST activist Flavinha Tereza explained, “In Água Preta the sugar cane culture is very strong, because it is close to the processing factories. Settled people still plant sugar cane because the harvest allows for a reliable family income.”<sup>404</sup> MST activist Claudio Aldo explained that the sugar cane harvest occurs from November to March, and everyone is involved. However, it is very difficult and people suffer a lot, and then they spend the rest of the year unemployed.<sup>405</sup> The politicians, on the other hand, are more positive about the sugar cane industry. Eduardo Cultinho, who in 2011 had been mayor of Água Preta for three non-consecutive terms, said, “The majority of the settlements are growing sugar cane, it is the key crop. It creates jobs and makes alcohol, which is good for the environment.”<sup>406</sup> Eduardo believes the sugar cane industry is a good development for the population of Água Preta, because of the jobs that are generated.

Despite the different agrarian contexts of Água Preta and Santa Maria da Boa Vista, the clientelist political relations in these towns are uncannily similar, with feuding mayors controlling hundreds of political appointments and people aligning with different mayors for material survival. I learned this first-hand when I went to Eduardo Cultinho’s house for the first time, on July 9, 2011. As we pulled in a truck, after miles of driving on almost-impassable muddy roads, there was a group of people waiting outside his gate. Someone opened the gate, so we could pass through, and this group followed behind us. I was escorted to Eduardo’s office, and he asked me to have a seat and wait while he, “attended to those people who were outside.” The first person who entered was a woman who said she had someone sick in her family, and she asked if Eduardo could help. Eduardo called in his assistant and asked him to give her 50 reais (about \$25). Eduardo said to the woman, “It is only a little, but it is from the heart, so you can buy some groceries.” After this woman left, two more men came inside. The first told Eduardo he had walked barefoot for four hours to arrive. The other told a different story I could not quite understand from afar. After the two men left the office, Eduardo called his assistant in again and asked him to give each of the men 30 reais (about \$15). Eduardo turned to me and said, “I know that it should not happen this way, but I have to help people when I can. Before it was a lot worse, more people came, I had to start saying no.” As the mayor and major patron in Água Preta, the citizens that are aligned with Eduardo look to him for material survival.

Unlike Santa Maria, the electoral struggle in Água Preta is not within one family, but between different powerful families, most recently the Cultinhos and Magalhães. Iudo Magalhães was the mayor of Água Preta from 1989 to 1992, at that time a member of the

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<sup>404</sup> All information from Flavinha Tereza, unless noted, is from an interview on September 7, 2011.

<sup>405</sup> All information from Claudio Aldo, unless noted, is from an interview on July 26, 2011.

<sup>406</sup> All information from Eduardo Cultinho, unless noted, is from an interview on July 9, 2011.

Democratic Workers Party (PDT), a party historically associated with the left-wing leader Leonel Brizola.<sup>407</sup> Unable to run for reelection in 1992, Iudo supported his nephew César Romero do Nascimento—who also ran as part of the PDT—in the election. César successfully beat their family’s political rival, Eduardo Cultinho, the grandson of one of the largest landowners in the state. During this period of time rural union supporter Miguel Arraes of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) was also becoming popular in this region. Although Eduardo’s family was historically associated with the Brazilian military party (AERNA and then PFL), Eduardo decided to join the PSB in 1995. As he put it, “The problem is that the southern sugar cane region (*mata sul*) is much more linked to the left, so this is where everyone was leaning.” In other words, the switch of parties was to some extent about political opportunism.

In 1996, Cesar stepped down so his uncle Iudo could run against Eduardo again, in a bitter election that ended in Eduardo’s victory and the Pernambuco state courts temporarily banishing Iudo from politics, due to accusations about his involvement in several rural assassinations. The Barreto family, which owned a few local businesses in Água Preta, supported their son—Paulo Barreto—in the next election in 2000, with Iudo’s blessings. Paulo Barreto explained, “Before my father was linked to Eduardo’s father, but then we went to Iudo’s side.”<sup>408</sup> Paulo Barreto, running as part of the PMDB, lost to Eduardo in 2000, beat him four years later in 2004, and then lost again in 2008 while running as a member of the Republican Party (PR). The reason Paulo switched parties, he explained, is “because of the legacy of Miguel Arraes and the PSB in the region, and Lula’s polarity, which was making everyone vote for the left” He decided to join the PR because the party had a connection to Lula at the national level. However, this strategy did not work and in 2012 Eduardo was elected for a third term.

*Table 7.1: Political Transitions in Água Preta*

| <b>Years</b> | <b>Mayor</b>                            | <b>Notes about mayors</b>   | <b>Secretaries of Education</b>  |
|--------------|---|---|----------------------------------|
| 1988-1992    | <b>Iudo Magalhães (PDT)</b>             | He was previously part of the PFL, before joining the PDT, eventually switched to another party.  | Maria Celha Negeira de Gois      |
| 1993 to 1996 | <b>César Romero do Nascimento (PDT)</b> | Iudo’s nephew, was 21 when elected, also ran as part of the PDT.  | Sabastião Sales and Ines Senna   |
| 1997 to 2000 | <b>Eduardo Cultinho (PSB)</b>           | Family is owner of largest sugar cane <i>fazenda</i> in the region. Family is from the PFL, but Eduardo left to join PMDB and then PSB in 1995. | Julieta Pontual and Rosana       |
| 2001 to 2004 | <b>Eduardo Cultinho (PSB)</b>           | Strong connections to PSB statewide party.  | Julieta Pontual and Rosana       |
| 2005 to 2008 | <b>Paulo Barreto (PMDB)</b>             | Wins with support of Iudo; during this term, Barreto switches to the PR, due to the dominance of the left.                                      | Ines Senna                       |
| 2009 to 2012 | <b>Eduardo Cultinho (PSB)</b>           | Wins back third, non-consecutive term.  | Albertinha Maria de Mélo Tenório |

*\*I interviewed all of the mayors and Secretaries of Education in Table 7.1 (except Maria Negeira de Gois and Sabastião Sales)*

<sup>407</sup> Since 1992 Iudo Magalhães has changed parties several times, becoming part of the PFL and most recently PR.

<sup>408</sup> All information from Paulo Barreto, unless noted, comes from an interview on July 6, 2011.

None of the mayors I spoke with, except perhaps Eduardo Cultinho, felt that his party defined who he was as a politician. Paulo Barreto explained, “What is important in Água Preta is your color, yellow or red. Left and right wing does not mean anything, what exists are individuals, no one votes for the parties . . . the minority of people are loyal to their party.” Paulo went on to say that if a person *does* care about his party, it is because of the resources and money, probably a reference to Eduardo Cultinho and his PSB support. Similarly, Iudo Magalhães explained that the left and the right “does not exist, it is no longer significant, the PSB has all of the different parties within it.”<sup>409</sup> This is why, in 2011, there were no contenders for mayor of Água Preta that were running as part of a right-leaning party. Instead, Eduardo and Paulo were both part of parties that had an alliance with the PT at the national level.

Iudo’s nephew Cesar, who was the youngest mayor ever elected in Pernambuco, also went into detail about this political culture. He said, “To be sincere, in the rural interior the dispute for power is much more personal than it is political. It is about fights between people much more than about ideologies.”<sup>410</sup> Cesar also discussed the connection between economic and political power, describing the relationship as an “umbilical cord.” Eduardo Cultinho’s family was one of the biggest economic powers in the region, due to the family’s previous ownership of the large *Fazenda Cantende*. Cesar claimed that Eduardo only went to the “left” because, “my family occupied the political space on the right.” Eduardo, on the other hand, claimed to be “different” than the rest of his family. He discussed his respect for Miguel Arraes of the PSB at length, and how Arraes had come to Água Preta to help with his campaign.

#### **“Good Neighbor Policy”: Government Orientation Towards the MST**

In Água Preta there are deep political divides between powerful families, however, these divides are based on a political struggle organized around clientelistic relations, not overt ideological differences. The MST arrived in this region in the late-1980s, amidst these political conflicts, but only really started to garner strength in the mid-1990s. By the mid-2000s there were over 30 agrarian reform settlements in this municipality organized by both the MST and other rural social movements—the largest number of agrarian reform settlements in the state. All of the mayors of Água Preta since the MST’s arrival in 1988—Iudo, Cesar, Paulo, and Eduardo—expressed similar feelings towards the MST. They were generally supportive of the idea of agrarian reform, but critical of the fact that once families receive land they do not always produce on it, and sometimes even sell this land. For example, Iudo said, “The MST and agrarian reform should exist . . . but it needs to be better organized to give more opportunities to small land owners . . . however, there are people who are part of these invasions who have nothing to do with the countryside, and they get land so they can sell it . . . I support agrarian reform, but without fighting or conflict.”

Iudo expressed his support for the *idea* of agrarian reform, but was very critical with the way that it was being carried out by the MST. Nevertheless, he tried to respond to the MST’s demands: “The MST came to ask for transport and money sometimes, and I would help them . . . it was just to make them happy, to avoid conflict.” Paulo Barreto, who was theoretically in a “right-leaning” party when he was elected in 2004, said, “There are no conflicts between us . . . whenever MST leaders came to ask for things we attended to their needs, for example, offering them transportation for an event.” Paulo mentioned one of the main leaders of the MST in Pernambuco, Jaime Amorim, saying that he admired Jaime. He said that if there was a meeting

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<sup>409</sup> All information from Iudo Magalhaes, unless noted, comes from an interview on July 27, 2011.

<sup>410</sup> All information from Cesar Romeiro do Nascimento Leira, unless noted, is from an interview on July 8, 2011.

of *Sem Terrinha* (little landless ones) in Recife, he always paid for the children's transport.

The most complex relationship to understand was between Eduardo Cultinho of the PSB and the MST. The MST activists I spoke with were more supportive of Eduardo than these other politicians. For example, Flavinha Tereza said, "With Eduardo Cultinho we have a good relationship . . . he funded a gathering of 1000 youth . . . he helped with a lot of other issues in this region." However, when I spoke with Eduardo he did not express complete sympathy for agrarian reform. He said that if land was unproductive, it should be distributed; however, he was very critical of recent MST occupations on productive land. In terms of his financial support of the MST, he was pretty dismissive of any larger meaning of this support: "I have always had a good dialogue with the MST. Why shouldn't I support a meeting of MST youth? I attend to the needs of the Evangelical church, the local soccer team, a guy who wants to go to the beach, why not fund an MST gathering?" As this statement makes clear, Eduardo's sees his relationship with the MST as similar to other civil society groups, such as a church or soccer team, or even an individual request. When I asked Eduardo why his oppositional candidate, Paulo Barreto, also supported the MST, he responded, "In order to minimize conflict with the MST. It is the philosophy of Good Neighbors." It seems that the mayors of Água Preta all had the same general orientation towards the MST: nominally supportive, with deep criticism, but primarily dedicated to avoiding conflict.

### ***Political Opening for MST-State Coproduction of Municipal Schools***

In Água Preta there are over thirty agrarian reform settlements, which used to be land owned by the local sugar cane mills (*eugênios*). Often, these sugar cane mills had their own private schools for their employee's, which eventually became municipal public schools. Consequently, when the MST began to win access to land in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, many of the agrarian reform settlements already had a school. Currently, there are dozens of small schools located on agrarian reform settlements in Água Preta. These are most often one- or two-classroom schoolhouses, with multi-grade classrooms and no principals. During my fieldwork in Água Preta I was only able to visit three of these schools (due to the rainy season, geographical distance, lack of transportation). However, I was able to interview all of the secretaries of education since 1994, as well as four teachers, five officials in the municipal secretary of education overseeing the rural schools, and six past and current members of the regional MST education sector.

Based on these interviews, it is clear that during the late-1990s and early 2000s local MST activists were able to convince the mayors of Água Preta to let the movement participate in the public school system. This was not an immediate action, but rather, a gradual process of speaking to each new set of mayors, secretaries of education, and teachers in the municipality about the MST's educational proposal. Mauriceia Vicente de Lima is one of the founders of the MST education collective in this region. She had moved to a camp at a young age, and started teaching the children on the camp. Soon after, Jaime Amorim arrived and asked her to move to the MST's headquarters in Caruaru, to be a secretary in the statewide office. She learned a lot, which is why she was asked to start an education collective in Água Preta in the mid-1990s.

Mauriceia said that initially the major program she coordinated was an adult literacy program, funded through UNESCO. This literacy program brought a lot of other people into the MST education collective, as the movement chose out sympathetic residents to lead the literacy campaign who could also be activists in the movement. Flavinha Tereza and Elienai Maria da Silva were both examples of young women in this region (one from the city, the other living in a settlement) that began to work with this literacy program and eventually became dedicated full-

time MST activists. Together, Mauriceia, Flavinha, Elienai and others started the process of visiting schools on new MST settlements. The MST activists went to these schools to discuss the MST's educational proposal, and also encourage these teachers to attend the statewide educational seminars the MST was organizing. Mauriceia said that almost all of the teachers in these schools were from the city center, and had serious reservations about the MST: "They thought the MST was a bunch of thieves . . . the teachers were very scared of the MST." The MST activists, however, disregarded these critiques and started to dialogue with these teachers, finding creative ways to support them and their educational work.

The two main secretaries of education between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s were Ines Senna and Julieta Pontual (see Table 7.1). Both of these ex-Secretaries of Education expressed initial skepticism about the movement, but also described the positive relations that eventually developed with these MST activists. Ines Senna said, "I never had any contact with MST activists. I thought they were terrorists, ignorant, but after becoming Secretary of Education I began having contact with them and I changed. I thought they were marvelous . . . there was nothing they asked for that I did not give them."<sup>411</sup> According to Ines, activists were allowed to visit settlement schools, organize community-school gatherings, and even ask for time off for teachers to attend statewide MST teacher trainings. Julieta Pontual, the other secretary of education during this period, also spoke positively about the movement, and specifically Rubneuza Leandro, the head of the MST state education sector: "Rubneuza and the MST were already here when I arrived . . . I always supported them, let them sleep in the schools when there was an event in the settlements . . . they would also have events in Normandia [MST headquarters in Caruaru] . . . I had a huge friendship with Rubneuza."<sup>412</sup> Julieta even mentioned attending an education event at the MST's headquarters in Caruaru, and thinking that it was very well organized. She supported the municipal teachers attending these statewide seminars. The MST activists in the education collective during this period described the situation slightly differently. For example, Flavinha said: "The secretaries of education do not fight with us: they pretended to be sympathizers, allowing teachers to go to our gatherings, but in private they told the teachers 'you do not have to go if you do not want to.'" IN other words, the support of the Secretaries of Education was never full-force.

Nonetheless, despite these contrasting perspectives, MST activists did have some degree of political opening to visit the schools and send teachers to the statewide MST teacher trainings during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Through this work, several of the teachers in the municipality began to support the MST's educational proposal. Brasilina Barbosa da Silva had been working in her school well before the area was turned into an agrarian reform settlement. Her parents were renting a house near the old sugar mill when the MST occupation happened, and because of this her family was able to receive a plot of land on the settlement. Brasilina said that at first she was scared of the MST, and thought they were illegal outlaws. "Then I began to make friends and get to know a lot of people . . . lots of people close their doors to the MST, but I never close my doors."<sup>413</sup> She was soon invited to an MST teacher training which transformed her perspective, as she began to understand and participate in the MST's struggle. Similarly, Sonia Cordeiro dos Santos had been teaching in the same school for 23 years when I talked to her in 2011. She was working in this school when the MST occupied the surrounding land. She

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<sup>411</sup> All information from Maria Ines Senna da Silva, unless noted, is from an interview on July 6, 2011.

<sup>412</sup> All information from Julieta Pontual, unless noted, comes from an interview on July 6, 2011.

<sup>413</sup> All information from Brasilina Barbosa da Silva, unless noted, is from an interview on July 27, 2011.

was scared about what would happen. She said, “The MST activists came to have a conversation with us in the school. They said, now this community is going to be a *Sem Terra* community, and they put a flag up in the school.”<sup>414</sup> Over time, as the MST activists kept visiting her school and inviting her to teacher trainings, Sonia began to support the MST’s educational proposal.

A third example is Norma, another teacher who became passionate about the MST’s educational proposal. When my MST activist-host, Elienai, had to leave town one day, she dropped me off at Norma’s house for the day. Norma told me that she has been to three gatherings of *sem terrinha* children in Recife, as well as attending teacher trainings in the MST’s headquarters in Caruaru several times as well. She recalled her first *sem terrinha* gathering: “We brought sixty kids from the region, and there were 3,000 children at the event . . . What impressed me the most was the march on the last day, we walked to the government palace and there were emergency vehicles and cold water, it was very organized . . . in the end three children were allowed to go talk to Governor and give him their demands about their schools.”<sup>415</sup> Norma was impressed both with the organization of the event, and the power the MST had to pressure the Governor to talk to the children. Now Norma works in the municipal Secretary of Education and is an internal state advocate for the MST.

Despite these three examples, winning over municipal teachers to support the MST’s educational project was not easy, and never fully successful. As Flavinha described, “The profile for the teachers made this difficult . . . they were respectful when we were in their space, but it was hard to convince them to leave.” Flavinha told one story about inviting the teachers to go to a statewide education seminar the MST was organizing. There were 80 teachers who confirmed that they could go, and Flavinha and Mauriceia prepared all of the food and transportation for the trip. On the morning of the seminar, however, only 5 people showed up! Flavinha blames the teachers’ fear to participate on the system of intense domination in the region, where rules have to be followed or their entire families might be persecuted. For these reasons it was difficult to convince all of the municipal teachers to support the MST’s proposal.

Nonetheless, there was a significant amount of political opening to continue working with the teachers in the schools. As Rubneuzza exclaimed, “There was never a problem with the administration! Julieta was there as Secretary of Education, she was very open.” Thus, it is very possible that the MST, over time, could have won over the teachers in Água Preta, as the MST education collective did in Santa Maria da Boa Vista—through a slow and steady war of position. However, by the mid-2000s MST activists were losing their ability to mobilize civil society in these areas of agrarian reform, both in terms of social mobilization and maintaining moral and intellectual leadership. This proved disastrous for the movement’s educational goals.

### ***Losing Moral and Intellectual Leadership***

While the relationships between MST activists and the municipal secretaries of education were becoming stronger during the 2000s, the MST’s relationship with its own base became progressively weaker. By the time I arrived in 2011 there were few MST activists present in the region, and most of the families in settlements no longer identified with the movement. As for the education collective, the activists that still participated had difficulties visiting the settlement schools due to the long distances, a lack of transportation, and heavy rains that washed out the roads for several months each year. More significant forms of educational work, such as hosting community-school gatherings and supporting teachers on a daily basis, seemed impossible.

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<sup>414</sup> All information from Sonia Cordeiro dos Santos comes from an interview on July 27, 2011.

<sup>415</sup> All information from Norma (unknown last name), unless noted, comes from an interview on July 18, 2011.

The critical difference between Santa Maria da Boa Vista and Água Preta was *not* government orientation or state capacity, but rather, the MST's level of mobilization in the agrarian reform settlements. When Eduardo Cultinho came to power again in 2008, his new Secretary of Education Albertinha Maria de Mélo Tenório, was initially open to the MST's educational project—just like Eduardo's previous secretary. In 2009, Albertinha agreed to host a seminar on *Educação do Campo* in the municipality. As Flavinha described, "In 2009 our relationship with the municipality matured and we had a seminar on *Educação do Campo*, paid for by the government of Água Preta." During this seminar the keynote speakers were Rubneuzza Leandro, from the MST, and Edla Soarez, the writer of the *Educação do Campo* federal resolution in 2001. Edla is also the ex-Secretary of Education of Recife and was the president of the National Union of Municipal Secretaries of Education (UNDIME). When I spoke with Albertinha she was enthusiastic about the seminar, describing the important information that Edla Soarez shared about adapting schools in the countryside to rural realities.<sup>416</sup> Flavinha believed that one of the reasons that Albertinha was open to paying for this seminar was because the MST was able to bring someone as prestigious as Edla to Água Preta, which a small municipality would never have been able to do on its own. Regardless of motive, hundreds of municipal teachers were required to come to this seminar.

Nonetheless, despite these recent political openings, the MST has continued to encounter serious difficulties moving forward with their educational proposal—not because of the lack of government support, but due to the lack of support from families on settlements. When I talked to Albertinha she alluded to these difficulties:

When I arrived in the Secretary of Education, the MST came to talk to me about the schools in the countryside . . . they had gatherings of *Sem Terrinha* and asked for teacher to go as well . . . we try to give the MST whatever it wants . . . However, something I realized is that even though we are open to this, it is often the community that does not want the MST in the schools . . . One time the parents came here to say they did not want a certain teacher in her school because she was teaching the children to be '*sem terra*'"

Albertinha claims to advocate for the MST's proposal, however, she has become cautious because she believes that the parents in the settlements do not always support these ideas.

The teacher that Albertinha is referring to is Elienai, one of the original members of the MST education sector in the mid-1990s and early-2000s.<sup>417</sup> In 2009, Elienai took a municipal exam and became part of the official teaching network. Because she was a well-known MST activist, an official in the municipal secretary of education decided to assign her to a school in an agrarian reform settlement. Elienai, with permission from this official, began to incorporate some of the MST's educational pedagogies into her classroom: forming student collectives, teaching the MST national anthem, and discussing the history of agrarian reform. However, after a few weeks the parents began to criticize Elienai and her teaching method as bringing "the movement" into the school. The government official in the municipal secretary of education overseeing this school, Maria Jose da Silva, explained:

When I went to Elienai's school the parents told me that she was teaching the

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<sup>416</sup> All information from Albertinha Tenório, unless noted, is from an interview on July 7, 2011.

<sup>417</sup> All information from Elienai Maria da Silva, unless noted, is from an interview on July 17, 2011.



'movement', and it was polemic. We had to meet with Elienai, and we had to tell her to follow the municipal educational proposal . . . for me Elienai was forming critical citizens that know their rights, but for [the parents], she was creating troublemakers.<sup>418</sup>

Maria Jose claimed to admire the MST's pedagogical proposals. However, she said that the municipal government could no longer allow Elienai to use these educational practices because there was no parental support.

Elienai was very open about these difficulties the MST is facing in the region. She explained that over time the MST has become more absent from the settlements, and this has affected the movement's ability to implement its educational proposal. She said:

Another issue that I see is that, right now, if we had a teacher in a settlement school that we did not like, we could not change this, because we no longer have the support of our base. With the help of the base we could have a protest in the city; but we do not have this support. Today, if we wanted to have a protest about municipal education in Água Preta, bringing people to the streets would be difficult.

In this statement, Elienai argues that the MST has lost its capacity to "accompany" and offer guidance to the settlements in this region. Due to a lack of activists, very little money, and too many other activities, the close accompaniment of settlements is no longer occurring. She continued, "We no longer have the support of our base. If we try to occupy INCRA to demand loans, agricultural assistance, the only people we will be able to bring are those in our camps. The settlements will have two or four people, maybe none." In other words, the MST has lost its ability to garner the consent of the people living in the settlements for an alternative hegemonic project; the MST has lost its moral and intellectual leadership in these territories.

Other people, from government officials to MST leaders, also acknowledge the difficulties the movement is facing. MST leader Jaime Amorim said, "The sugar cane region (*zona da mata*) is our oldest region, but the development of activists there is very hard." An MST activist who joined the education sector more recently, Alex Santos, also argued that the primary challenge in the region is the movement's connection to the grassroots base in the settlements. "The MST leadership has relationships with the mayors, and we can get money for gatherings. But we no longer discuss agrarian reform in the settlements."<sup>419</sup> Alex believed that this will have repercussions, because "politicians like Eduardo Cultinho only care about the MST if the families are aligned with the leadership." Eduardo himself alluded to this reality. He said, "I still have a relationship with the MST, but the MST has lost a lot of support of society . . . our settlements are becoming rural *favelas* . . . the base of the MST has not gotten the result that they hoped for." Although Eduardo did not say that he would stop supporting the MST, he has certainly noticed the lack of moral leadership the MST currently has in these settlements.

The teachers who were previously advocates for the MST's educational proposal also expressed this lack of support. Brasilina, for example, said, "The MST has to be more present, they have to talk to people and open their eyes, because when the MST is not here in the schools no one participates . . . I feel very alone. There needs to be a team of people accompanying my work." Brasilina explained that in contrast to previous periods, the majority of the teachers in her

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<sup>418</sup> All information from Maria Jose da Silva, unless noted, comes from an interview on July 7, 2011.

<sup>419</sup> All information from Alex Santos, unless noted, is from an interview on July 9, 2011.

school have not had contact with the MST. There was also a period that the MST flag was in the school, but now Brasilina just takes it out for certain events. When I interviewed Sonia, I asked her what aspects of the MST's pedagogical proposal she was implementing in her school. She simply responded, "There needs to be more accompaniment, the teachers need more support." In other words, she was finding it difficult to implement any of the MST's educational ideas on her own. Thus, even the teachers the MST had previously won over are currently not able to incorporate the MST's pedagogies into their classrooms. And if they were able, it is unclear if the families in these settlements would permit them to do this.

Why did the MST lose its moral and intellectual leadership in agrarian reform settlements in this region? One factor is certainly the agrarian context, and the fact that President Lula supported the reconstitution of the sugar cane—an economic development model that completely contradicts the MST's alternative hegemonic proposal. Another contributing factor is the lack of money. The MST had a huge financial crisis in this region. Previously there were programs, like technical assistance programs and adult literacy programs, through which MST activists were paid to be in the settlements. Now these programs no longer exist. Both Elienai and Alex said that people began leaving the education sector in the late 2000s, as the movement could no longer support them. In 2009, Elienai herself had to find a job to survive, and in 2001 she her days in a two-room schoolhouse. Alex was left in an education collective by himself.

A third issue is the geography of the region. In Santa Maria da Boa Vista most of the MST settlements are set alongside one road, and there are buses that travel up and down this road each day. In Água Preta, settlements are located far from each other, and there is little to no public transportation. During the rainy season, these roads are also often impassable.<sup>420</sup> Finally, a fourth issues is that the teachers in the schools in Água Preta are always changing. Since the schools are very small with no principal, it is hard to construct teacher collectives that are self-sustainable. As Alex said, "The problem is we are always restarting, restarting, restarting. We need a teaching body specifically for our settlement schools." However, even if the MST activists were able to win this concession, Elienai's story illustrates that the community itself might obstruct the process. While the agrarian context, money, geography, and the rotation of teachers are clear obstacles to MST-state coproduction in Água Preta, it is likely that these barriers could be overcome if the MST still had high degrees of mobilization in civil society.

### ***Conclusions***

As the case of Água Preta exemplifies, clientelistic, low capacity contexts offer countless opportunities for the MST to participate in the public school system. However, the movement has not had enough regional strength to capitalize on these opportunities and form lasting relationships with the parents, teachers, and children living on the agrarian reform settlements. This is not a problem specific to the MST education sector; it is representative of a general disconnect between the MST leadership and the families living on agrarian reform settlements. Welford (2010b) elaborates on the reasons for these difficulties in Água Preta—reasons that are connected to the dominance of sugar cane planting in the region and the fluctuating value of sugar over the past two decades. Despite the willingness of government officials to work with MST activists, it was civil society itself—that is, the lack of significant MST mobilization among civil society groups in support of their educational project—that obstructed MST coproduction.

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<sup>420</sup> I learned this, attempting to arrive at a settlement with Alex Santos, on a motorcycle that became stuck in a foot of mud. We had to push the motorcycle through piles of mud for miles, before making it to the settlement.

## Chapter 8: Conclusions

I have told the story of how the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement has attempted to transform the rural public education system over the past three decades. The MST arrived on the Brazilian scene in the early 1980s, when the rural school system was marginalized and public school curriculum was determined by a middle-class orientation that assumes all school children need to learn the same content. MST activists knew they were never going to live that white-collar, urban existence, and they fought not only for access to public education, but for a public school system that valued their peasant traditions. Through decades of organizing, the movement successfully brought their educational proposal—currently known as *Educação do Campo* at the federal level—into national consciousness. This educational approach supports a curriculum that values rural life, teaches students about the history of agrarian reform, and emphasizes the importance of collective agricultural production. The proposal also entails a radical reconfiguration of the traditional hierarchy between communities, students, teachers, school principals, and state officials. The MST has had a significant degree of success supporting these educational ideas at the federal level. However, activists' ability to transform the K-12 rural public school system differs drastically across the country.

I have analyzed how MST activists attempt to implement their goals in two federal agencies, three state governments, and two municipalities. Together, these cases illustrate that the transformation of public education to support an alternative hegemonic project is possible, even if only momentarily. These cases also suggest that this type of transformation can occur in a variety of political and economic contexts, and that even within the same governing level institutional change can take various forms. However, my analysis also illustrates that these cases of institutional transformation cannot be understood in separation. Federal level shifts affect state and municipal governments, and vice-versa. The MST's educational experiments in Rio Grande do Sul in the early-1990s were part of the inspiration for the national level campaign for *Educação do Campo* in the late-1990s. Conversely, once the federal government embraced these educational practices, government officials in the Ministry of Education were critical in pushing forward the *Educação do Campo* proposal in many states. Even within the same governing levels, these institutional shifts were connected, as the Ministry of Education's appropriation of a bachelor program first created by the Ministry of Agrarian Development exemplifies. Thus, the seven cases explored in this dissertation are interrelated, and comparisons between these cases can only be understood relationally (Hart, 2002).

### Analyzing Variation Across Cases

Many of the same catalysts and barriers to institutional transformation were present in these seven cases, some of which initially appear to be in contradiction to each other. For example, in the successful cases of educational reform it was often internal allies, high levels of mobilization, and high-capacity government support that allowed the MST to participate in public schools. However, in other contexts success was a product of weak institutions, a lack of government expertise, and a slow process of garnering consent among a wide range of actors. In the cases where institutional transformation was not possible, technocracy, elite expertise, high-capacity antagonism, and frontal attacks were barriers. In other cases it was processes such as "elite capture" and an increasing disconnect between the MST leadership and its base that prevented MST participation. In Table 8.1, I outline these general barriers and catalysts to

educational transformation in the two federal ministries, three state governments, and two municipalities examined in this dissertation.

Table 8.1: General Catalysts and Barriers to Institutional Transformation

|           | Case   | Catalysts   | Barriers   | Outcome   |
|-----------|--|---|--|---|
| Federal   | <b>Ministry of Education (MEC)</b>   | High levels of mobilization, internal state allies.   | Technocracy, elite expertise, elite capture.   | Partial incorporation of the MST's goals into the state, without high levels of coproduction. |
|           | <b>Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA)</b> National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) | High levels of mobilization, internal state allies, weak institutions, lack of elite expertise. | Frontal attacks.   | Full MST-state coproduction of university programs, but open to attack.                       |
| State     | <b>Rio Grande do Sul (RGS)</b>   | Internal state allies, high levels of mobilization, high-capacity support.                      | High-capacity antagonism, frontal attack, elite expertise, low levels of mobilization. | Full MST-state coproduction for ten years, then it is radically reversed.                     |
|           | <b>Ceará (CE)</b>  | High-capacity support, High levels of mobilization.   | Low state capacity.  | Full MST-state coproduction of rural high schools post-2010.                                  |
|           | <b>São Paulo (SP)</b>  |   | Technocracy, Elite expertise, High-capacity antagonism.                                | No MST-State Coproduction.  |
| Municipal | <b>Santa Maria da Boa Vista (SMBV), PE</b>   | High levels of mobilization, low-state capacity, slow process of garnering support.             | Low-state capacity (barrier for access to more resources).                             | Significant MST-State Coproduction.   |
|           | <b>Água Preta (AP), PE</b>   |   | Disconnect with the movement base.   | No MST-State Coproduction.  |

It is useful to briefly summarize each of the seven cases in Table 8.1, to illustrate how these barriers and catalysts affected outcomes. In the Ministry of Education (MEC), a coalition of highly mobilized social movements came together in the late 1990s to pressure the federal government to support a united proposal for *Educação do Campo*. In 2001, the rural workers' union (CONTAG) was able to push forward a federal law in support of these educational ideas, through unionists' previous connections within the federal government. Then, with the election of the Workers Party (PT) in 2003, and rising levels of social mobilization, this proposal was implemented at a rapid pace. However, the bureaucratic hierarchies within the MEC, the technocratic orientation of officials who insisted on the mass expansion of programs, the incorporation of "best practices," and the entrance of agribusiness elites into the debate, has meant that the MST's educational goals have been implemented *without high levels of MST*

*participation*. This has created a growing gap between the MST's original proposal and the contemporary form *Educação do Campo* has taken at the federal level.

In the case of the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), housed in the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA), high levels of mobilization forced an antagonistic federal government to support the creation of the educational program, PRONERA, in 1998. However, without any internal allies it was impossible to incorporate this program into the MEC, and instead, President Cardoso put PRONERA under the oversight of INCRA, in the Ministry of Agrarian Development. This unique historical conjuncture has meant that PRONERA's institutional trajectory has been very different than the trajectory of *Educação do Campo*. In contrast to the MEC, there are many people who are close allies to the MST within INCRA. In addition, INCRA is a relatively weak institution, allowing for social movement participation "by default" (Wolford, 2010a). Furthermore, since there is a lack of *educational* expertise among INCRA bureaucrats, the MST's educational proposal as not threatening. Nonetheless, the fact that this far-reaching educational program has been able to maintain its radical roots has meant that it is continually attacked by many sectors of Brazilian society.

In Rio Grande do Sul, the combination of high levels of mobilization and internal allies during a tolerant government allowed the MST to begin coproducing "Itinerant Schools" on MST camps. When an extremely supportive state governor was elected several years later, this "educational experiment" expanded rapidly. High state capacity allowed MST-state coproduction to flourish, not only within MST camps but also in settlements. However, in 2007 this same high state capacity facilitated an antagonistic government's ability to end these experiences. An intense ideological conflict took place for the next four years, as government officials insisted that they had the proper educational expertise to govern schools, while MST activists vilified the government by insisting that "to close a school is a crime." This whole period, in addition to other internal factors, served to weaken the MST's ability to mobilize. Thus, when another supportive government took power in 2011, MST-state coproduction was still not possible.

In Ceará, the federal government's interventions in 2005 introduced the debate about *Educação do Campo* to government officials in this state. However, low state capacity prevented this proposal from moving forward. It was not until the federal government intervened again in 2009, offering the Ceará state government the financial and administrative resources it needed to construct a dozen new public high schools, that full MST-state coproduction developed. High levels of MST mobilization succeeded in pressuring the state government to build four of these schools on MST settlements. These levels of mobilization also helped the MST place their own activists in leadership positions within these schools, which was critical to the implementation of the MST's educational proposal.

In São Paulo, twenty-years of a technocratic, highly bureaucratic state government, antagonistic to the MST and to federal educational trends, has prevented the MST's educational proposal from moving forward. The state government's emphasis on "elite expertise," the anti-participatory culture, and its urban-centric orientation have all been major barriers to activists' ability to implement the movement's educational proposal. Despite dozens of well-resourced schools on MST settlements, the movement's ideas are basically non-existent. However, unlike Rio Grande do Sul, this has not resulted in an intense class-conflict. Instead, it is now "common sense" among MST activists that the movement will simply never be able to participate in the public school system in this state.

In Santa Maria da Boa Vista, Pernambuco, high levels of MST mobilization allowed activists to engage in a slow, fifteen-year process of garnering consent among different civil

society groups for their educational project. The low-state capacity in this municipality and lack of government support for education facilitated the teachers', principals', and bureaucrats' openness to this educational proposal. The clientelistic (non-programmatic) orientation of the municipal government has meant that this war of position in the trenches of civil society is an effective means of convincing politicians on both sides of the political divide to support the MST's educational goals. However, low capacity has also been a barrier, as the schools in Santa Maria are still under resourced and in dire need of more administrative and financial support.

Finally, in Água Preta there is a clientelistic political culture that is similar to Santa Maria da Boa Vista. Although this provided an opening for the MST to engage the state in educational transformation in Santa Maria, in Água Preta the MST itself is in crisis. While this municipality has more agrarian reform settlements than any other location in the state, very few of the families living on settlements support the movement. The MST leadership in Pernambuco has lost its moral and intellectual leadership among their base in Água Preta. Thus, even though MST activists were able to convince the municipal government to support their educational proposals, it is the settlement families themselves preventing the MST's participation in the public schools.

As these cases illustrate, the MST was able to transform public education in several distinct political, economic, and social contexts. However, there were also many cases in which insurmountable barriers to institutional transformation prevented MST-state coproduction. This variation allows for three types of comparisons: between agencies within a single government, between subnational governments at the same governing level, and between different federal, state, and municipal governments and agencies. I outline some of the most prominent findings that come out of these different levels of comparison in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Findings Across Different Levels of Comparison

| Level of comparison  | Cases                  | Findings   |
|--|------------------------|--|
| Within a Single Government                                   | MEC and INCRA          | <p>Even within a single, supportive government, social movement goals can have different trajectories when implemented into diverse types of government agencies.</p> <p>The nature of the institution into which social movement goals become institutionalized <i>matters</i> when analyzing the trajectories of these goals.</p> <p>Once institutionalized, social movement goals can either become increasingly distant from activists' original intentions, or in certain cases, maintain their radical roots and facilitate more mobilization.</p> |
| Between Subnational Governments (same governing level)       | RGS, CE, SP            | <p>High state capacity, supportive governments, and high levels of social movement mobilization are the best recipe for participatory governance.</p> <p>High-capacity antagonism can negate the positive effects of mobilization.</p> <p>Low capacity can be a barrier to state-society coproduction, even among supportive governments.</p>  |
|  | SMBV and AP            | <p>A strong connection between the leadership of a social movement and its base (ability to maintain moral and intellectual leadership) is critical for state-society collaboration to develop.</p>  |
| Across Governments and Agencies (different governing levels) | MEC and SP             | <p>Technocratic governance, the belief in elite expertise, and hierarchical bureaucratic structures are barriers to participatory governance, in both antagonistic and supportive governments.</p>   |
|  | RGS and SMBV           | <p>Social movements can implement their goals in the public sphere through a diverse set of social movement strategies (e.g., through both a war of movement and a war of position).</p>   |
|  | MDA and SMBV           | <p>Under certain conditions, weak institutions and low state capacity can facilitate participatory governance, especially if there is no threat to entrenched elite expertise.</p>   |
|  | RGS (post-2010) and AP | <p>High levels of both internal and external social movement mobilization are critical for activists' participation in the public sphere, even in favorable political contexts.</p>  |

In the following sections, I revisit the theories I introduced in Chapter 2, in attempt to illustrate how the findings in Table 8.2 speak to each of these bodies of scholarship. I argue that while some my findings in this dissertation reinforce prominent ideas in these literatures, other findings call for significant revisions of current thinking regarding the conditions under which social movements may successfully engage the state.

## Relevance for Scholars of Social Movements

### *Social Movements are Not Always Outside of the Polity*

First, one of the most important general findings in this dissertation is the following: interactions between social movements and states are not always confined to moments of contestation, conflict, and demand making—what Tilly (2008) refers to as “repertoires of contention,” or the range of non-institutional claim-making performances available to social movements at a given time (pp. 4-5). Rather, activists often go beyond demand making and agenda setting to become active participants in the public sphere, what Ostrom (1996) called “crossing the great divide.” When activists participate in the public sphere a process of institutionalization can take place, as activists’ demands are incorporated into the bureaucratic state apparatus through public policies, offices, ad hoc programs, the hiring of activists for new government positions, and the incorporation of activist groups into state decision-making structures. However, the path “institutionalization” takes varies widely—depending on the historical conjuncture, the nature of the federal agency or subnational government, and the social movement itself—and these paths do not all end with movement demobilization and decline.

Thus, in conceptualizing social movements, I argue that we must move away from their traditional definition in the political process model as, “rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through non-institutionalized means” (McAdam, 1999, p. 37). This definition assumes that social movements are not members of the polity and do not have “routine, low-cost access to resources controlled by the government” (Tilly, 1978, p. 53). While the MST does frequently engage in non-institutionalized forms of contention, in many regions the movement has also succeeded in obtaining routine, low-cost access to government resources. This is currently true in the Ministry of Agrarian Development, in state of Ceará, and in Santa Maria da Boa Vista. Defining a social movement as a group that acts only outside of state channels obscures the dynamic ways social movements engage the state and participate in the provision of public goods.

### *The Nature of the Institution Matters*

A second finding in this dissertation is that the process of institutionalizing social movement goals does not simply lead to movement decline. This process *can* lead to movement decline, and the de-radicalization of social movement goals, but in certain contexts the institutionalization of these goals can also result in the state’s support of counterhegemonic practices, which directly facilitate the mobilization of that movement. This is not a complete rejection of the Piven and Cloward-Michels thesis, but rather, a reconstruction. I argue that the nature of the institution that social movement goals become institutionalized within *matters* when you are analyzing outcomes.

This finding is particularly clear when comparing the two federal cases. The Ministry of Education (MEC) and Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) have had very different histories, and consequently, have developed different institutional cultures. The former agency has been a staple of Brazilian bureaucracy since 1930, and has a set of highly centralized and formalized rules. The latter agency went through several different transitions, but has only existed in its current form since 1999. It was then that the agency in charge of agrarian reform, INCRA, was also incorporated within this ministry. INCRA is a comparatively weak institution in the Brazilian bureaucratic landscape, perhaps the most underfunded of any of the federal agencies relate to its mission (Wolford, 2014). INCRA is also decentralized, with offices in every state. This combination of factors has allowed for high levels of movement participation.



Between 1998 and 2005, the MST succeeded in institutionalizing aspects of their educational proposals in each of these federal agencies, through the office for *Educação do Campo* in the MEC and the Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA) in INCRA. However, while both of these programs are now part of the Brazilian federal state apparatus, they have had distinct institutional trajectories. In the MEC, a wide range of actors has embraced *Educação do Campo*, including most recently, the agribusiness lobby. In addition, the location of this office within an extremely hierarchical and bureaucratic agency has meant that many of its programs have been implemented on a mass scale without the MST's participation. I argue that *Educação do Campo* has become hegemonic within the MEC. In other words, this proposal is now part of educational "common sense" in this agency. However, *Educação do Campo* is also hegemonic because it is part of the political and social milieu that has helped to create an inter-class alliance that currently supports the dominant mode of industrial agricultural production in Brazil. This story seems to confirm the Piven and Cloward-Michels thesis.

In contrast, I argue that PRONERA is institutionalized but has remained counter-hegemonic, in so far as it continues to directly facilitate the MST's ability to mobilize an alternative hegemonic project. However, while the MST has maintained a high degree of control over the implementation of PRONERA programs, the fact that this program directly supports the movement's internal mobilization has made it vulnerable to frontal attacks. Thus, unlike *Educação do Campo*, PRONERA will only remain within the Brazilian state apparatus if the MST and the movement's allies continue to mobilize for its existence. Again, this comparison illustrates that the process of institutionalization of social movement goals depends on the nature of the institutions themselves.

### ***Political Opportunities are Still Relevant***

A third finding that speaks to the literature on social movements concerns political opportunity structures, defined as "consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow, 1994, p. 85). The cases in this dissertation confirm that these types of political opportunities are also critical in analyzing the success social movements have institutionalizing their goals. However, in this case I am not analyzing movement emergence, but rather, the capacity of an already well-known social movement to convince the government to support its educational proposal. Therefore, "expectations for success or failure" are not as relevant as *if and when* a government is willing (and able) to work with MST activists.

Thus, while shifts in dimensions of the political environment are relevant, the reasons for variation in these cases are not so much activists' expectations, but the government's response to their demands. I have found state capacity and the government's orientation towards the MST to be two characteristics of the nature of the state that influence the MST's ability to coproduce rural public schools. The former is a theoretical concept that has received much attention over the past three decades (Evans, Rueschemeyer, & Skocpol, 1985). The latter is more of a descriptive concept, assessing the relationship between specific subnational governments and the MST. Together, these two concepts help to analyze why the *same* social movement, mobilizing at *equal* levels around the country, produces diverse outcomes. In contrast to the concept of political opportunity, the narrow scope of state capacity and government orientation are easily comparable between subnational governments.

### ***Mobilization is Critical, both Externally and Internally***

A fourth finding in these cases is that levels of mobilization—a staple of social movement analysis—continue to be important in analyzing social movements engaging in the public sphere. Concepts such as framing, political opportunity structures, elite and indigenous networks/resources, and repertoires of contention are useful tools in analyzing why the MST has been able to garner the support of government officials for their educational goals. For example, in the early 1990s, UNESCO, UNICEF, and dozens of university professors offered the MST financial resources and public legitimacy, which allowed the MST’s literacy programs to flourish. In the mid-1990s a massacre of 19 MST activists shifted the political context, as public opinion became more sympathetic to agrarian reform. This allowed the MST to win several major educational concessions. Then, in the late-1990s, the MST reframed its educational proposal from the “the pedagogy of the MST” to “Education of the Countryside” (*Educação do Campo*), which helped to consolidate a national alliance of rural organizations in support of the MST’s educational proposal. These examples illustrate why concepts such as elite resources, political opportunities, and framing, continue to be relevant for analyzing mobilization.

However, in addition to reinforcing the importance of external mobilization, these cases illustrates that *internal* mobilization is equally critical. This internal mobilization is what I refer to as the degrees of MST mobilization in civil society. Although the social movement literature offers a language for analyzing external levels of mobilization (how and when a social movement is successful in showing its force), the shifting relationships between the leadership and the base are not often discussed.<sup>421</sup>

Wolford’s (2007, 2010b) scholarship has played a critical role in illustrating why internal movement dynamics matter. Through an in-depth ethnography, Wolford has shown that people embody multiple MST identities, which cause them to participate in the movement at certain points in time and distance themselves at other moments. In other words, MST identity has to be continually (re)produced through multiple forms of grassroots work with families living in areas of agrarian reform. Wolford (2010b) analyzes the “banal geographies of resistance,” (p. 6) in order to understand how rural people interpret “agrarian justice” and why their loyalties to the MST shifts overtime. Wolford argues that social movements are “competing discourses negotiating for the rights and ability to define who will represent the poor and how” (p. 10).

In this dissertation I have tried to build on Wolford’s definition of a social movement. The cases I explore in this dissertation reinforce Wolford’s argument that social movements are constantly competing with other groups for the right to represent the rural poor. Drawing on Gramsci, I see this as MST activists’ attempt to gain “moral and intellectual” leadership in the countryside for an alternative hegemonic project. In this sense the activists who are involved in the everyday struggle of promoting the movement’s goals are similar to a Gramscian political party. A Gramscian political party is what Tugal (2009) has redefined as political society: “the sphere where society organizes to shape state policies but also to define the nature of the state and political unity” (p. 25). Political society is the link between civil society and the state, or between civil society and an alternative hegemonic project. The MST leadership is clearly fulfilling this role, as activists attempt to link rural populations to an imagined political body—the MST—and help to constitute people’s everyday experiences with politics. This process, as

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<sup>421</sup> Social movement scholars have discussed internal organizational structure at length. However, forms of organization are different than assessing how social movement leaders garner the moral and intellectual leadership of its base for an alternative hegemonic project.

Wolford argues, is always in competition with other organizations attempting to gain “moral and intellectual leadership” among the rural poor.

The case of Água Preta illustrates why these internal levels of mobilization are critical. Over the past decade, the MST leadership has lost its connection to the families living in agrarian reform settlements in Água Preta. These families no longer feel a sense of belonging or attachment to the MST. Many families are even antagonistic to the movement, and critique activists’ presence in the settlements. Although the municipal government was open to implementing the MST’s educational proposal in the early- and mid-2000s, it was the families themselves that revolted against the MST and declared that they did not want the “movement” in their schools. This shows that low levels of MST mobilization among civil society groups in areas of agrarian reform—a lack of “moral and intellectual leadership”—is an insurmountable barrier to implementing the MST’s educational proposals in public schools.

### ***Strategies Involve both Public and Not-So-Public Contention***

Finally, a fifth finding that is relevant to scholars of social movements concerns political strategy. Tilly (2006, p. 210) writes that, “Contentious repertoires differ dramatically from one type of regime to another. Both government capacity and extent of democracy strongly affect the ways that people make collective claims on each other and how authorities respond to those claims.” I build on this assertion, comparing different subnational political regimes and characterizing them based not on democracy, per se, but on the government’s orientation towards the MST and state capacity. However, unlike Tilly, I do not exclusively analyze instances of “public displays of contention,” but rather, the variety of strategies that allow for activists’ successful participation in and transformation of the public sphere.

In focusing not only on traditional social movement repertoires, but also the slow process of garnering consent on the ground, I draw on Gramsci’s (2000) concept of the war of position—the “art of politics” in the “trenches” of civil society (p. 233). Following Dosh (2010, p. 26), who studies squatter movements in Peru, “there are not automatic ‘winners’ in terms of strategy choice. Rather, the success of a chosen strategy rests on how well it reflects existing constraints.” In the cases explored in this dissertation, the MST utilizes distinct and often contradictory strategies to engage the public sphere. A comparison between two of the successful cases, Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Maria da Boa Vista, illustrates this finding particularly well.

In Rio Grande do Sul, MST activists were able to implement many of their pedagogical ideas in the state public system over three different (supportive and tolerant) administrations, from 1996 to 2006. First, the MST engaged in massive displays of public contention that convinced a tolerant governor to support the movement’s educational proposal. The MST’s ideas were implemented with even more force during the supportive PT government, when the boundaries between social movement and party activists became blurred. During this period, the educational initiatives in MST public schools were connected to other political transformations across the state. Although the PT lost the next election, the threat of contention convinced the centrist government to largely maintain the MST’s educational proposal. It was the MST’s war of movement—the large displays of public contention—that convinced these governments to support the MST’s educational initiatives. It was only in 2007, when a government openly antagonistic to the MST came to power, that these initiatives ended.

In contrast to Rio Grande do Sul, in Santa Maria da Boa Vista the MST has been able to implement alternative educational practices in the municipal rural school system for over fifteen years. In this municipality citizens are not “protected from arbitrary government action” (Tilly’s (2006) definition of democracy). Rather, politicians struggle for power based on personal, direct

exchanges with citizens. In this context, MST activists have engaged in a war of position, working within the state and slowly but surely winning over teachers, politicians, bureaucrats, parents, and community members for their educational project. The teachers are enthusiastic about the MST's pedagogical support, in the context of a low-capacity regime that offers few opportunities for their professional development. These educational transformations have had continuity over several different political administrations.

This comparison suggests that successful social movement strategies do not always involve public displays of contention. Rather, "habitual social arrangements" (Auyero, Lapgna, & Poma, 2009, p. 51) and the "backroom deals, patron-client relations, [and] organizing efforts that precede claim-making" (Tilly, 2006, p. 49) are critical to activists' ability to engage the state. In less democratic contexts, such as clientelistic regimes, or in political regimes where traditional social movement repertoires are more limited (i.e., low-capacity nondemocratic), the process of garnering consent among diverse civil society groups is a key component of the struggle. In Santa Maria, activists' ability to convince groups on both sides of the political divide to support their educational project directly facilitated the movement's ability to participate in the public sphere. Although the MST does engage in some traditional social movement repertoires in Santa Maria, it was the war of position that made the mayors' concessions possible. This suggests that the overwhelming focus on public displays of contention in the social movement literature should be revisited.

## **Relevance for Scholars of State-Society Relations**

### ***Participatory Governance is Not Always State-Led***

In addition to refuting, reinforcing, and reconstructing several concepts in the social movement literature, the findings in this dissertation are also relevant to scholars of state-society relations. Firstly, a major finding in these cases is that participatory governance is not always driven by government-initiated reforms. In much of the literature on participatory budgeting and coproduction, the assumption is that the state has to mobilize civil society to participate, not vice versa. Although there are some notable exceptions (Abers & Keck, 2009), the belief that participatory governance must be cultivated—or "engendered," as the World Bank Institute describes the process<sup>422</sup>—is dominant in this literature. This ignores the fact that marginalized communities across the globe have been demanding the right to participate in state decision-making for decades. Many of these social movements, including the MST, have already incorporated participatory governance into their movements as an internal practice. Therefore, there is a need to move from assessing how governments can cultivate civil society participation, to analyzing *what social conditions convince governments to allow civil society to participate*. This shift in our analysis becomes especially relevant when a contentious social movement is advocating for goals in opposition to the state's own interests.

### ***State Capacity Continues to Matter, but Not by Itself***

A second finding is that state capacity continues to matter, however, we cannot analyze state capacity independently of characteristics of the state. In the literature on participatory governance, this "reach of the state"—the state's capacity to implement intended policy goals—is a center of debate. As Yashar (2004) writes, "we cannot assume that states are competent,

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<sup>422</sup> World Bank Institute website, <<http://wbi.worldbank.org/wbi/about/topics/governance>> (accessed May 12, 2014).

purposive, coherent, and capable . . . To the contrary, we must analyze states and state projects in light of the reach of the state – understood in terms of the state’s actual penetration throughout the country and its capacity to govern society” (p. 6). In this dissertation, I have emphasized the varied “reach of the state” among subnational governments.

Many scholars argue that high state capacity is a critical factor for successful participatory governance to develop (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2005; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Evans, 1997; Heller, 1999). In this perspective, state capacity is necessary to establish and enforce the rules of the game, to avoid corruption, and to offer the proper training for citizens. However, in direct contrast, other scholars argue that it is precisely where state capacity is weak that social movements have more room to participate in the public sphere (Abers & Keck, 2009; Hochstetler & Keck, 2007; Joshi & Moore, 2004; Wolford, 2014). These scholars assert that civil society groups are actually the ones that mobilize the *state’s* capacity to follow-through on policy goals, and that weak institutions create more space for movement participation. How do we reconcile these opposing findings?

I argue that both of these positions are partially correct. If we understand the MST’s participation in public schools as an explicit attempt to develop an alternative hegemonic project, often in conflict with the state, then these varying roles of state capacity makes sense. First of all, high-state capacity should only facilitate MST-state coproduction if the movement’s goals align with the state’s own interests. This could be true in two cases, the case of a supportive government truly dedicated to participatory governance, or the case of a tolerant government who is only concerned with avoiding conflict. In the case of an openly antagonistic state government, high state capacity is likely to work against a social movement. Similarly, low state capacity also has different effects depending on the orientation of the government. On the one hand, if a state government has low state capacity, it might be unable to implement the MST’s educational goals, even if it is supportive of these initiatives. On the other hand, low state capacity might make an otherwise unsupportive government—for example, a mayor with a clientelistic orientation and no interest in agrarian reform—more open to the MST’s participation. In this context, the fact that the movement can implement an educational proposal that the state is otherwise incapable of implementing facilitates cooperation. A brief comparison of several cases illustrates these points.

In Rio Grande do Sul there was successful MST-state co-production for more than a decade, a result of tolerant and supportive governments, high state capacity, and significant degrees of MST mobilization in civil society. However, when an openly antagonistic government took power in 2007, all of the schools located on MST camps were shut down, as well as hundreds of other rural schools. Educational practices were homogenized across the state, based on an urban centric curriculum. This was similar to the process that had already been occurring in São Paulo for two decades, where an antagonistic government prevented MST participation. Even in rural schools located hundreds of miles from the state capital, the high state capacity of São Paulo ensured that MST-state coproduction would not be possible. These two cases illustrate that high state capacity is only positive when combined with a supportive state orientation towards civil society; otherwise, high state capacity can be detrimental. While the combination of high-state capacity, a supportive government, and high levels of mobilization continues to be the best recipe for participatory governance, high state capacity that is antagonistic negates the positive effects of mobilization.

In contrast to Rio Grande do Sul, the state of Ceará did not have a radical shift in government orientation, but rather, state capacity itself. The Ceará state government was tolerant

of the MST's educational proposal in the early 2000s, and even allowed the federal government to host a series of meetings about implementing *Educação do Campo*. However, as soon as the federal government stopped funding these initiatives, the MST's educational goals did not move forward. Even when a new supportive government took power, and the MST mobilized for state schools in their settlements, these demands were never met. It was only when the federal government intervened once again in 2008, and agreed to support the construction and oversight of a dozen new public high schools, did full MST-state coproduction develop. Again, this case illustrates that low capacity can indeed be a barrier to MST-state coproduction.

Nonetheless, if you compare across governing levels, a different picture appears in respect to low-state capacity. For example, in Santa Maria da Boa Vista the low capacity of the clientelistic municipal government facilitated the MST's ability to participate in the public schools. Unlike Ceará, there were already schools in many of the MST's settlements in Santa Maria, and activists were able to convince teachers, parents, and politicians of all persuasions that their participation could help to improve the quality of these schools. The municipal government's low-state capacity and lack of educational expertise meant that the MST's participation seemed beneficial and unthreatening. Similarly, within INCRA there is also a lack of educational expertise. INCRA is also relatively weak in the Brazilian institutional landscape. As Wolford (2010a) has argued, this often allows for MST participation "by default." In respect to PRONERA, this has meant that MST activists have been at the forefront of developing, implementing, and overseeing new PRONERA programs. They have been able to maintain a high degree of control over the content and organization of these educational initiatives. The cases of Santa Maria da Boa Vista and the MDA suggest that low state capacity is not *always* a barrier to participatory governance. In certain contexts, such as clientelistic contexts, low-state capacity might facilitate the perceived benefits of participatory governance. These findings offer additional nuance to the debate on the role of state capacity in participatory governance.

### ***Technocracy is Perilous for Participatory Governance***

A third finding that emerges from these cases is that technocracy can be a significant barrier to participatory governance, in both supportive and antagonistic contexts. As described in Chapter 7, technocracy is a form of governance whereby "experts" in various fields, such as scientists and economists, rather than politicians or partisan interest groups, are considered to be the appropriate actors in charge of policy making. Mitchel (2002) argues that technocracy is a "form of politics" which claims certain actors as experts and thus excludes others. In this case, who is (and who is not) defined as an "educational expert," directly affects the MST's ability to participate in the public educational sphere. Technocracy is an important issue to highlight, because it may also be a barrier to participatory governance in other global contexts.

A comparison between the Ministry of Education (MEC) and São Paulo illustrates how technocracy and bureaucracy become barriers in supportive and antagonistic contexts. In the case of the Ministry of Education, the mobilization of civil society forced the federal government to incorporate a new proposal for rural schools—*Educação do Campo*—within the ministry. At first, the MST, CONTAG, and other social movements were considered legitimate participants in defining the trajectory of this new educational approach. However, the technocratic and bureaucratic constraints to participation soon became apparent. First of all, there was a strict hierarchy within the Ministry of Education, which prevented the implementation of the *Educação do Campo* proposal. Second, even when *Educação do Campo* programs were created, the push for rapid expansion and the universal implementation of these programs prevented the MST's continual participation. Finally, the MEC insisted on pursuing global "best practices,"

which competed with the MST's own educational proposals. These barriers to MST participation existed even within a supportive (PT) government.

Another case where technocracy and the belief in elite expertise was an insurmountable barrier to successful MST-state coproduction was the case of São Paulo. The PSDB governors in São Paulo have been notorious for their antagonism to and critiques of the MST. However, if we examine this case more closely, we see that it is not the *antagonistic* orientation towards the MST, but rather, *technocratic* governance of the state that has been used to prevent MST participation. As the head of a regional board of education in São Paulo said, "I think that if you want to have a different curriculum then you can contract your own professors and run a school, and this would be your school. However, these are *our* schools and they are going to follow the curriculum of the state Secretary of Education." In other words, "educational experts" are bureaucratic officials within the state, and these are the actors that should be in charge of developing curriculum and other educational policies for the public school system. Dozens of teachers I interviewed in São Paulo expressed this same technocratic belief that civil society participation in determining the content and form of public schooling is inappropriate. In São Paulo, many of these government officials look towards the United States for educational expertise, implementing over the past decade new practices such as scripted curriculum, teacher merit pay, and intensive standardized testing.

The fact that many government officials in the global south have embraced the United States as an educational model has serious implications. As many educational scholars have emphasized, the public school system in the United States is following a neo-liberal paradigm, based on the market ideals of competition and privatization (Apple, 2006, 2007; Bonal, 2003; Lipman, 2011). This educational approach is technocratic in and of itself, closing down avenues for civil society participation in support of more centralized control of public schooling. If countries in the global south are positing the United States as the "holder" of "educational expertise," this will have serious consequences for participatory experiments in the public educational sphere. These findings about technocracy are also relevant to other participatory contexts. The notion that popular participation is slow and not as effective as top-down decision-making is pervasive in many countries. This investment in "elite expertise" is based on an assumption of "popular ignorance," or the inability of people to participate in the everyday decisions that affect their lives. Moving beyond this vision—cracking technocracy—is necessary for more participatory practices to develop.

### ***Constructing "Real Utopias" is a Good Strategy***

Finally, a fourth finding in this dissertation is the role of "real utopias" in grassroots-led reform processes. The MST is a national movement, active in 23 of the 26 Brazilian states, with thousands of active members at any given moment. Of these thousands of activists, hundreds are dedicated to mobilizing around the issue of education, and are tasked with implementing the movement's educational proposals in the rural public school system. How did all of these MST activists, living in far-off rural communities, know what this educational approach should look like? In Chapter 3, I argue that the MST's ability to develop a concrete pedagogy for public schools was an iterative process, based on praxis—connecting educational theory to practice. However, the bureaucratic constraints of the public school system meant that the movement could only implement their educational proposal in an ad hoc fashion, without ever maintaining complete control over students' educational experiences. Therefore, activists could never know what the movement's educational proposal would actually look like, if fully implemented. Thus,

in order to solidify the MST's educational proposal, activists had to create educational institutions outside of the traditional public school sphere.

Wright (2013) argues that real utopias “envision the counters of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals and then looks for social innovations we can create in the world as it is that move us towards that destination” (p. 9). By finding institutional arrangements in which activists could have almost full autonomy of students' educational experience, the MST was able to create “real educational utopias.”

The MST's first experiments with these “real utopias” were the high school teacher-training programs (MAG programs), implemented in coordination with several municipalities in the city of Braga, Rio Grande do Sul, in 1990. These MAG programs soon expanded to other states and eventually led to the founding of the MST's first “movement school” in 1995, the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC). Now, for over fifteen years, the IEJC has been offering alternative high school degrees in a variety of areas to MST activists. In 1998 the MST began experimenting with “educational utopias” in dozens of different universities, through PRONERA. These PRONERA programs are not technically outside of the public education system; however, these degree programs are *separate* from the regular university course offerings, and are reserved only for students living in areas of agrarian reform. The MST has had a high degree of control over these university programs, especially in the early 2000s. Finally, in 2005, the MST founded the Florestan Fernandes National School (ENFF) in São Paulo, which currently offers dozens of courses to activists in Brazil and across Latin America.<sup>423</sup> This MST national school is an exemplar of the type of “real educational utopias” the movement hopes to build in public schools.

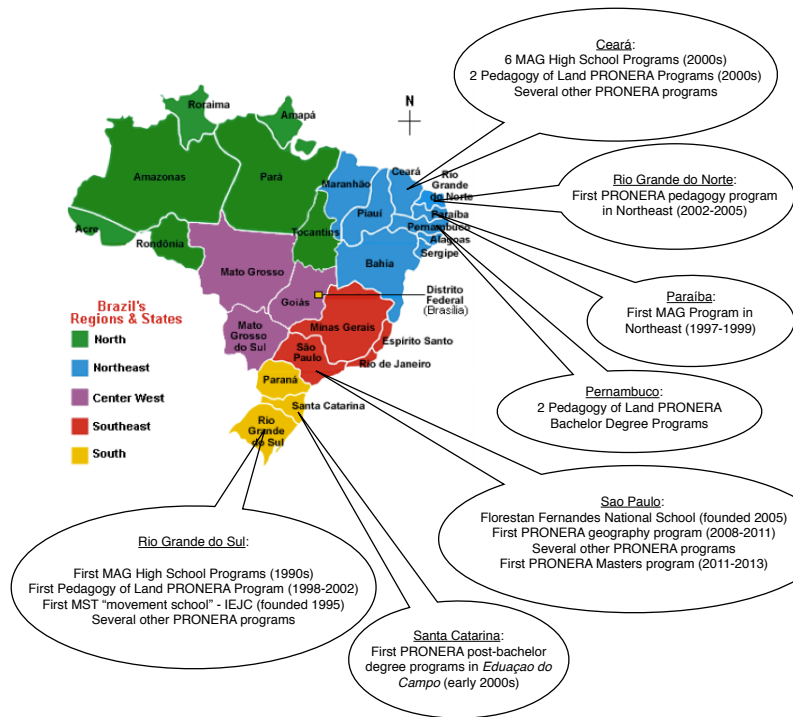
Over the past two decades, hundreds of MST activists have experienced these “real educational utopias”—through enrolling in MAG, IEJC, ENFF, and PRONERA programs—literally *living* the MST's pedagogical approach for several years at a time. All of these courses are organized through the pedagogy of rotation, which allows activists to study together for intensive 2-3 month periods, and then return home to implement community projects. When MST activists graduate from these programs, they have a clear vision of the type of educational proposal that the movement hopes to construct in the public school system. Many graduates return home to their MST camps and settlements dedicated to implementing aspects of this real educational utopia in their local public schools. Map 8.1 is an illustration of some of the most important “real educational utopias” for the activists who were protagonists in the seven cases I examined in this dissertation.

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<sup>423</sup> In 2014, the courses that were being offered at ENFF were: a 40-day course for MST leaders, offered twice a year; a 40-day course for all social movement leaders, offered three times a year; a 1 1/2 year-long Marxist theory course, held for one-week sessions six times a year; a 1 1/2 year-long course on Florestan Fernandes, held for one-week sessions six times a year; a 40 day “education for educators course” held for activists from across Latin America once a year; a three-month long Latin American Political Theory course, with 100 participants from 20 Latin American countries, held once a year. In addition, several other PRONERA programs are also held at this school. (Field notes, February 2014).



Map 8.1: Sampling of the MST's "Real Educational Utopias"



Map 8.1 is not a comprehensive list of all MST educational programs outside of the traditional public school sphere. As Appendix B shows, there are over 40 universities that have developed bachelor and post-bachelor degree programs with the MST through PRONERA,<sup>424</sup> and there are many other MST “movement” schools throughout the country. Map 8.1 simply illustrates the most important “real educational utopias” for the seven cases in this dissertation. For example, in Ceará, MST activists took the Pedagogy of Land PRONERA program and then became principals of the new *Escolas do Campo*. In Santa Maria da Boa Vista, several activists earned their high school degree through the first MAG program in the Northeast, in Paraíba, and then returned to found a regional MST educational collective.

Thus, these real educational utopias have played a critical role in activists’ ability to transform the public school system. This reinforces Wright’s two-step strategy for social transformation, whereby activists first build real utopian institutions in capitalist society’s niches and margins (interstitial strategy), and then work with the state to expand and build on these interstitial innovations (symbiotic strategy). This dual process, of constructing real utopias outside of the direct purview of the state and then using these experiences to dispute the nature of more mainstream public institutions, exemplifies the MST’s educational struggle.

<sup>424</sup> More recently, several different social movements organize many of these PRONERA programs, which limit the MST’s autonomy in these educational spaces.

## Relevance for Scholars of Education and Critical Pedagogy

### *Social Reproduction is not Every Public School's Destiny*

In addition to contributing to the literatures on social movements and state-society relations, the findings in this dissertation offer several lessons to scholars of education and critical pedagogy. First, the MST's attempt to participate in public schools, and their success doing so in diverse regional contexts, illustrates that public schools are not simply institutions of social reproduction. Although Althusser (1984), Bowles and Gintis (1976), and Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) provide a powerful framework for analyzing the correspondence between public schools and capitalist modes of production, their theories are inadequate because they do not offer a language for understanding resistance. They do not have a framework for analyzing how the MST succeeds in implementing educational practices in public schools that support alternative modes of production.

In contrast to these social reproduction theorists, Willis (1977) focuses on understanding resistance, or in other words, how students rebel against school authority and create a counter-culture in schools. However, despite these moments of resistance, in Willis' analysis schools still function to reproduce the same class structures. Thus, even though Willis introduces the study of resistance into education, he fails to show how counter-hegemonic practices develop and connect to a larger movement for change. This demands the following question: from a Marxist educational perspective, is it actually possible to incorporate anti-capitalist, socialist pedagogies into the public school system, before a socialist revolution?

If we take a Gramscian approach to the study of public schooling, the answer to this question is yes. However, this attempt to transform public institutions will always be partial and contradictory. In other words, public schools are part and parcel of the "powerful system of fortresses and earthworks" outside of the state, which protects the state from frontal attack. These civil society "trenches" also represent the terrain where resistance for an alternative hegemonic project must be organized. Thus, the potential contribution of a Gramscian approach is to analyze reproduction and resistance as going hand-in-hand—even within a single institutional space—not as binary opposites.

In many of the cases I explore in this dissertation, examples of counterhegemonic pedagogies *are* present in state and municipal public school systems—e.g., students learning agro-ecological farming techniques and critiquing large agribusiness; classrooms named after revolutionary leaders, such as Rosa Luxemburg and Ché Guevara; and manual labor being positively integrated into the school curriculum. These examples of resistance to educational norms exist alongside a curriculum that is still urban-centric; mayors that use schools to maintain political power; and bureaucratic hierarchies that go against the MST's vision of schools as democratic spaces. This research illustrates that counterhegemonic pedagogies may exist in public school systems alongside practices that reproduce unequal social relations.

### *Critical Pedagogies are better Implemented by Social Movements*

A second relevant finding for scholars of education is the central role of social movements in implementing critical pedagogies in public schools. The field of critical pedagogy is dedicated to theorizing the emancipatory potential of education, including public schooling. As McLaren argues, "Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation-state" (McLaren, 1998, p. 441). Nonetheless, while the hope is that critical pedagogy will

offer teachers tools to help build a more equal society, scholars of critical pedagogy often fail to make the connection between radical educational practices and concrete examples of social change. Much of the critical pedagogy scholarship is focused primarily on why public schools reproduce the same economic, social and racial hierarchies (Apple, 2004; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Macedo, 2006; McLaren, 1999, 2003).

Giroux (2001) is perhaps the best known for his theories of resistance and education; however, Giroux discusses resistance primarily through an analysis of critical theory. This approach often fails to go from a “language of resistance” to a concrete analysis of the ways in which people using alternative educational practices form larger movements for change. Apple (2006, p. 80) notes this disconnect in the critical pedagogy literature, calling for more “substantive large-scale discussion of feasible alternatives to neoliberal and neoconservative visions, policies, and practices.”

This dissertation fills a major gap in the literature on critical pedagogy, illustrating that social movements are principal protagonists in developing, demanding, and implementing critical pedagogies in schools. The MST’s contribution to educational theory and practice is not a new or unusual development. As Knopp (2012) writes, “fighting for better schools and more equal access has been, will be, and must be part of the social movements that will ultimately be key to a more profound transformation of the economy, and in turn, the broader society” (p. 10). In other words, grassroots social movements have always been at the forefront of developing educational alternatives, which are connected to larger struggles for social change. Apple (2013) eloquently describes this process in the case of black activist-teachers in segregated schools in Virginia (p. 69-72) and Socialists Sunday Schools (p. 66-69). Other scholars have illustrated the connection between social change and education in the Highlander Center in Tennessee (Morris, 1984; Payne, 1997), Black Panther schools in Oakland (Payne & Strickland, 2008), literacy campaigns in Nicaragua (Arnové, 1986), and U.S. labor colleges (Altenbaugh, 1990). In all of these cases, social movements are primary agents in educational innovation.

The late educational scholar Jean Anyon spent the latter part of her career arguing for a synthesis of social movement and critical pedagogy literature.<sup>425</sup> She wrote that if this happens:

Critical pedagogy would take to the streets, offices, and courtrooms where social justice struggles play out. Curriculum could build toward and from these experiences. Vocational offerings in high school would link to living wage campaigns and employers who support them. And educational research would not be judged by its ostensible scientific objectivity, but at least in part by its ability to spark political consciousness and change—its ‘catalytic validity.’ (Anyon, 2005, p. 200)

This is precisely what has occurred in the case of the MST. Activists have taken their pedagogy into the streets (or more precisely, the farms), where the movement’s political struggle is located. These activists have developed curriculum that is relevant to their rural reality and dedicated to training a new generation of farmer intellectuals. The MST offers vocational courses that help train professionals to work in their communities, but also understand their political vision. Students in these schools are engaged in community research that has direct relevance to the MST’s struggle for agrarian reform.

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<sup>425</sup> Jean Anyon passed away on September 7, 2013.

While the MST's focus on education is not unique among social movements, its national scope and diverse outcomes does offer an unusual opportunity for comparative analysis. This dissertation has shown that social movement activists are often successful in implementing alternative educational proposals in public schools, but that these struggles are neither easy nor permanent. A range of factors has prevented MST activists from participating in public schools in diverse regional contexts. It is my analysis of the *micro politics* of this educational reform process, the ins and outs of educational transformation, the concrete power struggles that are taking place within these public spheres, that I hope will contribute to the ongoing conversation about how to transform public education.

### **Building on a Gramscian Framework**

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that Gramsci offers a useful framework for analyzing the relationship between social movements, the state, and public institutions. A Gramscian approach to state-society relations can help us understand how social movements work both within and outside of the state, in a process of institutional transformation. In this dissertation I have analyzed this process of state transformation in two different federal ministries, three state governments, and two municipalities. This comparison has raised questions regarding the ways in which Gramsci's theoretical framework do and do not apply to this type of subnational variation. Although I hope to explore these issues more in the future, here I briefly explain how I have attempted to build on Gramsci to analyze variation across the cases.

The driving empirical question of my dissertation was the following: under what sets of social conditions are social movements successful in transforming state institutions? This is similar to the question that inspired Gramsci's own writings: why did revolution succeed in Russia and fail in Western Europe? Despite these parallels, Gramsci's answer to this question—that civil society was stronger and more developed in the West—does not help us analyze subnational variation in contemporary Brazil. Thus, in an effort to make Gramsci's theories more appropriate for analyzing if, when, and how institutional transformation is possible, I return to the literature on state-society relations and social movements.

First, this research illustrates that the concept of state capacity is critical in understanding institutional transformation. State-society scholars provide an extensive literature on the conditions necessary for developing state capacity, and why this matters for participatory governance. In addition I have argued that government orientation is particularly important in the case of MST-state coproduction of public schooling. Although it is primarily a descriptive category, the more developed concept of political opportunity structures offers a theoretical basis for understanding why government orientation is critical. In the cases I explore in this dissertation, the combination of state capacity and government orientation help explain why the MST was successful implementing its goals in some public schools systems and not others.

Second, the cases show that it is necessary to analyze levels of social movement mobilization. I have described efforts to occupy land, organize protests, participate in occupations, and other direct, contentious actions as the MST's external mobilization, or, wars of movement. In contrast, internal mobilization concerns the relationship between the leadership and base. This is MST activists' attempt to gain moral and intellectual leadership in agrarian reform communities, or, engage in a Gramscian war of position. While Gramsci is useful in describing this latter concept, his writings are less helpful in determining where and when wars of movement will actually take place. Thus, building on Gramsci, I draw on many of the tools that social movement scholars offer to analyze levels of external mobilization. Table 8.3

illustrates how I have attempted to put Gramsci in conversation with these other bodies of literature, in order to theorize variation across subnational cases.

*Table 8.3 Building on Gramsci to Theorize Variation*

|                                |  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Nature of the State</b>     | <b>State Capacity</b>                                    | Extensive theory of how state capacity develops and why it matters (state-society literature).   |
|                                | <b>Government Orientation</b>                            | Political Opportunity Structures, a broad concept concerning opening up of access to new actors, political realignment within the polity, availability of allies, elite divisions (social movement literature). Provides a theoretical backdrop for the more precise, descriptive concept of “government orientation.” |
| <b>Nature of Civil Society</b> | <b>External Mobilization (showing force)</b>             | Repertoires of contention, framing, elite, and indigenous resources (social movement literature). Helps to analyze when and if wars of movement (Gramsci) take place.  |
|                                | <b>Internal Mobilization (leadership-base relations)</b> | War of position (Gramsci). Offers a theoretical distinction between social movement leaders (organic intellectuals, or, political society) and the broader civil society (which might participate in movements at different moments).  |

Table 8.3 is not intended to be applicable to every context. It is simply an initial attempt to illustrate some ways forward in theorizing variation within a Gramscian analysis. Again, this is critical for actually determining when, if, and how institutional transformations that support counterhegemonic resistance will take place.

## **Looking Forward: Participatory Governance, Public Schools, and Social Movements**

I began the preface of this dissertation arguing that this research is critical for three reasons: (1) The increasing fascination with participatory governance among a wide range of local, national, and international actors; (2) The lack of empirical research about how bottom-up grassroots educational reforms actually takes place; and, (3) The resurgence of social movements as a global issue without a theory of how these movements are actually implementing institutional reforms. In this conclusion, I have tried to speak to each of these issues, reinforcing, clarifying, and reconstructing several rich bodies of literature. I end with a few final thoughts on each of these issues, and possible areas for future research.

First, the issue of participatory governance. Participatory governance is about active democracy; the belief that people should be involved in the everyday decisions that affect their lives. Currently, “civil society participation” is being embraced by a diverse set of actors, from a range of ideological leanings, often with opposing goals. It is sometimes unclear what these participatory initiatives actually mean for contesting entrenched power relations. Thus, I advocate that we reframe questions about participatory governance and decentralization to ask: “Participatory democracy to what end?” This question moves away from simply assessing whether decentralization is “good” or “bad,” to analyzing how mobilized groups *use* the spaces created by participatory initiatives and state devolution to advocate for an alternative hegemonic project. For the MST, participatory governance is part of an alternative social vision, where working-class people own the means of production, collectively govern their communities, and

participate in all of the decision-making processes that are relevant to their lives. The system of participatory governance the MST is advocating for in schools is similar to the ones that activists are already using in their camps and settlements. The goal of these participatory initiatives is to teach rural populations not to be passive observers in history. Freire's referred to this as the "unfinishedness" of human beings, the belief that "it would be incomprehensible if the awareness that I have of my presence in the world were not, simultaneously, a sign of the impossibility of my absence from the construction of that presence." (Freire, 2001, p. 45). For MST activists, participatory governance is also about contesting power. It is both a means and an end; a form of strengthening their movement internally and also practicing the type of active democracy they want to create in the future. If we are truly interested in understanding how participatory governance takes place in practice, we need more studies of the social movements that are already engaging in these initiatives.

Second, the topic of education. I have shown that the process of educational reform is always a power struggle between interests that have different intentions and goals for the public school system. In an era where scholars of education are constantly attempting to find "best practices" to implement in public schools, it is critical to realize that viable alternatives already exist. It is simply incorrect that "there is no alternative" to the current educational paradigm that is based on ideals of accountability, measurement, and management. Apple (2006) says that, "The supposed alternative to these proposals—that is, ones that center around the literature on 'critical pedagogy'—are weak in crucial ways and thus will have a hard time interrupting rightist transformations" (p. 27). Nevertheless, this dissertation illustrates that schools *can* become important institutions supporting struggles for larger social transformations, but only when a highly organized movement with a clear vision for education can garner the consent of a variety of state actors. Federal, state, and municipal officials often oppose land redistribution and collective farming, and thus only support the MST's educational ideas through a combination of popular pressure and political compromise. My dissertation is a microanalysis of the politics of school reform, illustrating that communities' involvement in the provision of public education is dependent on their capacity to work with, in, and through local power structures. More empirical studies are needed about how marginalized communities can implement alternative educational pedagogies at this particular neoliberal moment.

Finally, the relevance of social movements. I have shown, concretely, how social movement activists implement their goals into the bureaucratic state apparatus. The social movement is the MST, and the state apparatus is public education, but these findings have implications for other social movements and other institutional contexts as well. This process of change can take place at the federal, state, and municipal level. It can also happen in different types of institutions. Sometimes it ends with forms of cooptation, while at other times it succeeds in producing public goods that are in direct conflict with the interests of elite classes. A shift in political power can end these initiatives, while an increase in state capacity might jump-start the process. In summary, activists can engage the state and implement their goals in a range of political, economic, and institutional contexts, through a diverse set of strategies, as long as they are able to maintain a strong link to the base of their movement—the people who will be the actual benefactors of the public goods activists are demanding to co-produce. I have offered some initial ways forward in analyzing these processes; however, more studies are necessary on how and under what conditions social movements "cross the great divide" and begin to play a role in the provision of public goods.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Manifesto of Educators of Agrarian Reform to the Brazilian People

In Brazil, we have arrived at a historical crossroads. On the one hand there is the neo-liberal project, which will destroy the Nation and increase social exclusion. On the other hand, there is a possibility of the organization of a counter movement and the construction of a new project. As part of the working class of our country, we need to take a position. For these reasons we have written this manifesto.

1. We are educators of children, youth and adults of Camps and Settlements in all of Brazil, and we place in our responsibility the fight for Agrarian Reform and social transformation.
2. We manifest our profound indignation of the misery and injustice that is destroying our country, we share the dream of constructing a new development project for Brazil, a project belonging to the Brazilian people.
3. We understand that education alone does not resolve the problems of the people, but it is a fundamental element in the process of social transformation.
4. We struggle for social justice! In education this means the guarantee of public education for everyone, free and of a high quality, from preschool education to the University.
5. We consider the end of illiteracy not only to be a responsibility of the state, but also a question of honor. For this reason we are dedicated to this work.
6. We demand, as workers within education, respect and professional value and dignified conditions for our work. We want the right to think and participate in the decisions about a political education.
7. We want a school that is preoccupied with the questions of our time, and that helps to strengthening social struggles and create solutions to the concrete problems of each community in the country.
8. We defend a pedagogy that is concerned with all the dimensions of the human being and that creates an educational environment based in the action and the democratic participation and in the culture and history of our people.
9. We believe in a school that can awaken the dreams of our youth, can cultivate solidarity, hope and the desire to always learn and teach and transform the world.

10. We understand that in order to participate in the construction of a new school, we the educators, need to construct collective pedagogies with political clarity, technical competence, and humanist and socialist values.
11. We struggle for public schools in all Camps and Settlements of Agrarian Reform of and we defend the pedagogical right these schools have in the participation of a Landless community and its organization.
12. We work for a school identity specific to rural life, as a pedagogical-political project that will strengthen new forms of development in the camp, based in social justice, agrarian cooperation, the respect for the environment and the valuing of landless peasant culture.
13. We renew, in front of everyone, our political and pedagogical dedication to the causes of the people, and especially with the struggle for Agrarian Reform. We continue to maintain alive the hope and honor of our Country, our principles, our dreams.
14. We join with all people and organizations that have dreams and projects for change, because together we can create a new education in our country, an education based in the new society that we have already began to construct.

**MST Agrarian Reform: A Struggle of Everyone**  
1st National Encounter of Educators of the Agrarian Reform  
We pay honor to the educators Paulo Freire and Che Guevara  
Brasilia, July 28-30, 1997<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> This document is translated from: (Caldart, 2004a, pp. 265–266).

## **Appendix B: List of University and Institutional Sponsors for PRONERA, 2003-2007**

### **University Partners (Total of 43)**

Universidade Estadual de Bahi (UNEB)  
Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP)  
Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana (UEFS)  
Universidade Estadual de Minas Gerais (UEMG)  
Universidade Estadual de Pernambuco (UPE)  
Universidade Estadual de Sao Paulo (UNESP)  
Universidade Estadual do Amazonas  
Universidade Estadual do Ceará  
Universidade Estadual do Maranhão (UEMA)  
Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso (UNEMAT)  
Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso do Sul (UEMS)  
Universidade Estadual do Rio Grande do Norte (UERN)  
Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB)  
Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA)  
Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB)  
Universidade Federal Alagoas (UFAL)  
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ)  
Universidade Federal de Campina Grande (UFCG)  
Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG)  
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)  
Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPEL)  
Universidade Federal de Roraima (UFRR)  
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC)  
Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UESM)  
Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFESCAR)  
Universidade Federal de Sergipe (UFS)  
Universidade Federal de Viçosa (UFV)  
Universidade Federal do Acre (UFAC)  
Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC)  
Universidade Federal Espírito Santo (UFES)  
Universidade de Brasília (UnB)  
Universidade de Montes Carlos (UNIMONTES)  
Universidade de Oeste de Paraná (UNIOESTE)  
Universidade de Reconcavo Baiano (UFRB)  
Universidade Federal do Maranhão (UFMA)  
Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA)  
Universidade Federal do Piauí (UFPI)  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN)

Universidade Federal de Grande Dourados (UFGD)  
Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco (UFRPE)  
Universidade Federal Rural de Semi-árido (UFERSA)  
Universidade Federal Rural de Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ)  
Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE)

**Federal Institutes and Private Educational Entities (Total of 12)**

Centro de Formação 25 de julho, MG  
Centro Integrado de Desenvolvimento dos Assentados e Pequenos Agricultores, ES  
Centro Social Rural de Orizona, GO  
Escola Técnica de Porto Nacional, TO  
Instituto Educar -- Instituto Federal Sertao, RS  
Instituto Federal do Parana, PA  
Instituto IPE Campo, Viamao, RS  
Instituto Federal do Pará,  
Instituto Dom Moacir, AC  
Instituto De Educação Josué de Castro, Veranópolis, RS  
Faculdade de Filosofia e Letras Diamantina, MG

## **Appendix C: Diversity of Degree Programs offered by PRONERA, 2003-2007**

### **Bachelor Degree Programs:**

Pedagogy of Land  
Agroecology  
Administration  
Teacher Formation  
High School Teaching  
Geography  
Agronomy  
Law  
Social Sciences  
Journalism  
Literature  
Agrarian Sciences  
History  
Arts  
Pedagogy of Water

### **Post-Bachelor Specialization Courses**

Family Peasant Agriculture and Education of the Countryside  
Adult and Youth Education  
Educação do Campo  
Agroecology  
Economy, Agrarian Development and Politics

### **High School Technical Degree Programs**

Agroecology  
Agriculture  
Cooperativism  
Community Health  
Community Radio  
Teaching Certificate  
Adult Education Teaching Certificate  
Nursing  
Administration  
Agroindustry  
Family Agriculture  
Agroforestry