Feeding the Nation while Mobilizing the Planet? La Vía Campesina, food sovereignty, and agrarian citizenship in Brazil[1]

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Conflicting states of food abundance and food scarcity are defining characteristics of post-WWII food regimes, while ecological crises in agriculture reach new proportions –climate change and changing weather patterns are leading to crop failures and increasing demands on technology to deal with pests and diseases. Linked contemporary food, ecological and financial crises have triggered new forms of a 'global land grab' where large-scale, cross-border land acquisitions for export-oriented food production are carried out by transnational corporations or foreign governments, further exacerbating the displacement of rural peoples, ecological degradation, and local food vulnerability (GRAIN 2008; Zoomers 2010). On the other hand, these crises have also fostered transnational and locally organized collective action by smallholder farmers, peasants, and fishers.

What sort of food systems emerge from current social and ecological crises in agriculture, however, is still an open question. Despite the displacing effects of the industrial transformation of agriculture, just under half of the world's population still lives and works in rural areas, with small-farm households still comprising two-fifths of humanity (Weis 2007). Contemporary agrarian social movements, comprised primarily of small-scale farmers and rural laborers, as well as indigenous people and fisherfolk, are searching for alternative models of production and political engagement that challenge the dominant corporate, export-oriented agricultural model supported by a series of global trade agreements that exclude the voices of most of the world's food producers. One such transnational movement, La Vía Campesina or "The Peasant Way," joins together 148 organizations from 69 countries throughout the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe to promote family farm based production, sustainable agriculture, and food sovereignty. The movement, representing about 200 million farmers, indigenous peoples, and fisherfolk worldwide, has developed a common platform from which to debate and formulate alternatives to the deepening power of capital over agrarian populations.

In this paper, I examine the evolving relationship between La Via Campesina and one of its founding – and largest - member movements, the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). How has participation in this transnational movement transformed domestic claims and targets around agrarian reform, environmental policy, and food security and food sovereignty in Brazil? Both the MST (formed in 1984 from a coalition of Brazilian agrarian social movements) and La Via Campesina (formed in 1993 from a coalition of international peasant movements) have developed strong discourses around rights and citizenship that are articulated and intertwined in local and global struggles around agricultural policy. These did not emerge in isolation from each other, but neither can it be argued that struggles for peasants rights, citizenship, and food sovereignty were simply 'domesticated' from the transnational, nor uni-directionally 'diffused' to the transnational. Rather, the multi-layered discourses around the development of a new concept of food sovereignty - with linked expressions at local, national and international levels - evolved in a tandem conversation, informed by local and global relationships and positioned in specific historical contexts (c.f. Yuval-Davis 1999).

The birth of a transnational peasant movement

Standing debates on the fate of the peasantry under capitalism center on the extent to which the peasantry will simply 'disappear' as an inevitable outcome of capitalist expansion – as a result of

the consolidation of agriculture in the countryside and the displacement of rural workers to urban factories – or whether [diverse] peasantries may exhibit special social and political characteristics that allow survival of rural smallholders in modern agricultural landscapes. In Brazil, for example, over five million peasants have been driven off the land since the late 1970s. This rural exodus has been partly fostered by the dissemination of modern agricultural technologies and the drive for large-scale production models that has increased the distancing of humans from their food source (Pretty 1995). It has reduced the capacity of Brazil's small-scale farmers to manage productive landscapes through the increasing loss of indigenous knowledge and diversity in production methods. It also threatens Brazil's national food self-sufficiency – small-scale farmers are responsible for the majority of food consumed in Brazil, providing over 70% of the local diet on only 30% of the arable land (IBGE 2009; de Athayde and Martins 2008; Domingos 2008).

In Brazil, hundreds of rural social movements, rural worker's unions, NGOs, and grassroots organizations have been active since the 1980s (and some long before) to push for the protection of their rights to access land for agricultural production, and for the right to have a voice in agricultural and rural policy. The MST formed in 1984 in the face of challenges to the viability of small-scale and family farming. By the mid 1990's the MST was one of Latin America's largest and most visible social movements, with the express aim of "ending the latifundio" in Brazil. The MST's demands broadly encompassed "land and social transformation" which included a renewed recognition of the constitutionally protected right to access underutilized land and a formal process of political formation of movement members based on a Freirian pedagogical model (cf. Freire 1970; MST 2001, 2002). Along with other rural and labour unions, the MST considered its campaign for agrarian reform as "the exercise of a citizenship right" (JST, 1987, v67, p10) and the awakening of a "consciousness of citizenship (JST 1986, v57, p16).

Transnational organizing has also been part of the MST's operational strategy since its initial formation as a movement. Egídio Brunetto, a long time representative of the MST in the international arena, including serving as a member of LVC's international coordinating council, argues that the MST developed a practice of internationalism that follows the historical legacy of international solidarity movements, referencing the anti-Apartheid movement, the role of Cuba in training 30,000 international medical doctors and the East Timor independence movement. For example, between 1984 and 2009 the MST sent over 4000 activists

> …to other countries to learn, be in solidarity, fight side-by-side with other peoples, exchange experiences, and to take our humble contributions from our own experiences. …The MST also received, in addition to public recognition, millions of actions in other countries in defense of our movement (Brunetto 2009).

Representatives from several South American agrarian movements, including Ecuador's National Federation of Peasant Movements (FENOC) attended the MST's 1st National Congress in 1985, with representatives of the MST attending FENOCs 6th National Congress the following year to "strengthen solidarity between Latin American peasants" (JST 1986, v57, p16). In the early 1990s, the inclusion of agricultural policy issues in the Uruguay negotiations of the GATT, finalized in 1994 with the creation of the WTO, sparked a surge in transnational peasant organizing and coalition-building. The radical changes proposed by the 1995 Agreement on Agriculture at the WTO included widespread trade liberalization of agriculture, focusing on the reduction of domestic support for agriculture, the elimination of export subsidies, the protection of intellectual property rights, especially concerning seed biotechnology, and the harmonization

of agricultural policy across member states. What was at stake in the early 1990s revolved – and continues to revolve in subsequent WTO negotiations related to the implementation of the Agreement on Agriculture – precisely around the question of sovereignty. By entering into the WTO agreement, states effectively lost the right to unilaterally set their own food and agricultural policies, including the protection of agricultural production and food-access rights for their citizens, constitutional protections of the right to land and food notwithstanding. National agricultural priorities and strategies thus became subordinate to the movement of international capital (cf. McMichael 1993, 200; Pritchard 2009).

National and regional peasant and farming movements across the globe were vocal in their opposition to agricultural trade liberalization negotiations throughout the 1990s, arguing that the loss of national and local support for agriculture would decimate rural communities, contribute to environmental degradation, and fail to address growing levels of global hunger (Borras 2010; Borras et al. 2008; Desmarais 2007). Increasingly, these movements were finding opportunities to meet and discuss common ground. The "500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular" campaign in the early 1990s brought together a wide range of grassroots Latin American movements. These mobilizations became progressively more concerned with the effects of agricultural liberalization and sparked a range of more formalized global peasant movement coalitions. Regional cross-border organizing around agrarian issues in Central America was coordinated throughout this period by the Association of Central American Peasant Organizations for Cooperation and Development (ASOCDE) (Edelman 2008), while broader Latin American transnational peasant organization coalesced through the work of the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo (CLOC), which held its first Congress in 1994 in Lima Perú to "exchange experiences among our organizations and seek forms of coordination and joint actions" (CLOC 1994). The Congress included 238 delegates representing 84 rural organizations from 18 Latin American and 3 European Countries.

In 1992, eight rural organizations from Central America, the Caribbean, Europe, Canada and the USA who were participating in a Unión Nacional de Agricultores and Ganaderos Congress in Nicaragua expressed concerns about external debt, environmental degradation, and effects of GATT negotiations on farmers in poor countries. Demanding 'direct participation in decision-making' in both the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio-92) and GATT negotiations, the organizations agreed to "strengthen their international ties with farm organizations around the world" (Desmarais 2002, 95; La Via Campesina 1992). As remarked by one European peasant leader present at that meeting, "La Via Campesina emerged almost accidentally, in a Congress in Central America in the middle of debates about the 500 years of resistance in Latin America, because we perceived the need to go forward in articulating a peasant voice in response to the globalization of agriculture, that has been very rapid and very dramatic" (Paul Nicholson, quoted in May 1996 MST Jornal Sem Terra no 158, p 11).

The following year, the MST, along with 31 national and regional peasant organizations, from 19 countries in Latin America, North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, met at Mons, Belgium to formally constitute La Via Campesina as an international peasant movement. Rather than a formally "north-south" or "south-south" coalition, the founding organizations of La Via Campesina recognized the dual challenges of declining domestic support for national, and particularly small-scale, family-based, agricultural systems and the global advancement of a food regime dominated by multi-national corporations. For example, Canada's National Farmers' Union, a founding member of La Via Campesina, was comprised mainly in the mid 1990s of small and medium scale grain farmers from the Canadian Prairies, who felt threatened by the

consolidation of control over agricultural inputs and marketing by multinational corporations. Then NFU shared concerns with organizations like the MST, both facing reductions in national supports for small-scale agriculture and the rapid advance of an industrialized agricultural policy.

As remarked by a member of La Vía Campesina's early operational secretariat in 1996, "we have been brought together through daily confrontation with the international capitalist system. We are still confronting this system, but today we also have the capability to negotiate on all levels" (cited in Desmarais 2007, 33). The unfolding of a multi-level transnational relationship involved developing relations of international solidarity and mobilization around family agriculture, rural livelihoods and the environment, based on the principle of "unity in diversity". Movements associated with La Via Campesina engage in a common critique of neoliberal policies as "anti-peasant", propose a range of alternative agrarian practices and emphasize the pursuit of social and ecological justice (Deere and Royce 2009; Desmarais 2007). Their global discourse and scope of action are broad, aimed at overturning the neoliberal economic model and implementing an alternative model of political participation, agricultural production and economic exchange that protects people and the environment. According to the movement's website,

> The principal objective of the Vía Campesina is to develop solidarity and unity among small farmer organizations in order to promote gender parity and social justice in fair economic relations; the preservation of land, water, seeds and other natural resources; food sovereignty; sustainable agricultural production based on small and medium-sized producers (La Via Campesina n.d.).

As a large coalition of global peasant movements, the Via Campesina sets itself apart from other agricultural coalitions (such as the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), in their oppositional mode of interaction with multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the WTO, and the IMF. Unlike IFAP, which has had consistent representation on civil-society dialogues with these organizations, La Via Campesina has enacted a more confrontational direct action approach in global mobilizations at WTO ministerial and global climate change negotiations. As one of the largest founding members of La Via Campesina, the MST has had significant influence on the organizing strategies and tactics of the transnational movement. Notable traces include the practice of an identity-building "mística" – a symbolic theatrical representation of agrarian historical struggles and contemporary realities, with roots in liberation theology and Freirian alternative pedagogy. The MST's substantive focus on direct action for agrarian reform and structure of regional coordination have also been scaled up and out through the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, a joint initiative of LVC and FIAN (the FoodFirst Information and Action Network) (cf. Borras 2008). Finally, LVC has adopted April 17th as an International Day of Peasant Struggle, commemorating the massacre of 19 MST members in 1996, as a coordinated day of public action around peasant rights.

While members of La Via Campesina may share a common set of ideological and political demands of their member governments, particularly around agrarian reform and a greater voice for peasants in agricultural policy, there is diversity within the movement's particular contexts. A common overarching platform was needed to serve as a unifying and alternative global proposition to an increasingly globalized food regime, but this platform needed to be flexible enough to represent these diverse national movements. In the next section, I discuss the emergence of an international organizing frame around the concept of food sovereignty, which

serves both as a vocal critique of national and international food security policy and proposes an agile alternative that protects agricultural and ecological diversity within regional food systems.

Food Sovereignty - a transnational food framework?

Food security – framed as a universal ideal to prevent world hunger – emerged as a post World-War II development principle enshrined in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the 1966 *International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. In 1974, under the "shadow of a world food crisis," the United Nations sponsored the first World Food Conference, adopting a Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition. It is worth quoting at length Article 4

> It is a responsibility of each State concerned, in accordance with its sovereign judgment and internal legislation, to remove the obstacles to food production and to provide proper incentives to agricultural producers. Of prime importance for the attainment of these objectives are effective measures of socio-economic transformation by agrarian, tax, credit and investment policy reform and the reorganisation of rural structures, such as the reform of the conditions of ownership, the encouragement of producer and consumer co-operatives, the mobilization of the full potential human resources, both male and female, in the developing countries for an integrated rural development and the involvement of small farmers, fishermen and landless workers in attaining the required food production and employment targets. Moreover, it is necessary to recognize the key role of women in agricultural production and rural economy in many countries, and to ensure that appropriate education, extension programmes and financial facilities are made available to women on equal terms with men (UN, 1973).

Twenty years later, at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, more than 800 million people were still estimated to be food insecure; poverty reduction and increased food production, distribution, and trade were advocated to achieve food security, "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".[2] This definition of food security treats food as a problem of insufficient trade, rather than hunger, by privileging *access* to food rather than *control over* systems of production and consumption. In this conception, food is a tradable commodity rather than a right, and hunger simply a problem of distribution (McMichael 2004; Patel 2010; Wittman 2011).

The way that food security is framed has significant implications for how agricultural and food policy is developed and challenged. A *hunger frame* focuses on food aid and technological development to increase global food production (Mooney and Hunt 2009). An *ethical* frame connects food as a human right (a focus of consumer and aid policy) to the right to choose how and by whom that food is produced (a focus of national agricultural and food policies (Anderson 2008; Gonzalez 2010). The UN-based right-to-food approach has been critiqued for focusing on the individual human right to food, rather than the structural problems of agricultural

[2] This definition has been in use by the FAO since 2001, as the latest of several modifications of the definition developed in 1974 at the World Food Summit: "availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices".

development, food production, and consumption within the world economic system (cf Wittman 2011).

Building on a common experiences of the broken links between the right to consume and the right to produce food, the member movements of La Via Campesina presented an alternative frame at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome. In La Vía Campesina's terms, a 'people's food sovereignty' encompasses the right of local populations to define their own agricultural and food policy, organize food production and consumption to meet local needs, and secure access to land, water, and seed. It is posed as a response to historic shifts in the meaning of food security fostered by the ongoing liberalization of agriculture, particularly in the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture, which denies states the right to 'full self-sufficiency as a national strategy' (McMichael 2003, 175).

Marcia Ishii-Eitemann argues that argues that the rights-based approach that is embedded in food sovereignty is

> 'an explicitly moral enterprise that stands in contrast to the economic processes of market-driven globalization', noting that 'this implies a radical shift from the existing hierarchical and increasingly corporate-controlled research system to an approach that devolves more responsibility and decision-making power to farmers, indigenous peoples, food workers, consumers and citizens for the production of social and ecological knowledge" (Dreyfus 2009: 114, cited in Ishii-Eiteman 2009: 691).

Similarly, in her analysis of rights-based approaches to world hunger in international negotiations on the right to food at the intergovernmental level, Jacqueline Mowbray (2007) critiques the 2004 *FAO Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Food in the Context of National Food Security* for focusing on the need for legal, political, and technical reforms at the level of the nation-state, while ignoring effects of the international economic system, and the need for redistributive change (561).

To access the material resources (including land, technology, inputs) needed to engender a food sovereignty model, agrarian social movements have begun to link material practices to local, global, and transnational advocacy for social, economic and cultural human rights (Desmarais 2007; Edelman and Carwil 2011; Holt-Giménez 2006). One key example of this is the current mobilization by La Via Campesina for an International Convention on the Rights of Peasants. The *Declaration of Rights of Peasants, - Women and Men*, elaborated through a set of regional and international workshops and conferences between 2001 and 2008, challenges the inability of current international rights conventions to protect the rights of peasants, arguing that "the violation of the rights of peasants damages the world's ability to feed itself":

> The struggle of the Peasants is fully applicable to the framework of international human rights which includes instruments, and thematic mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, that address the right to food, housing rights, access to water, right to health, human rights defenders, indigenous peoples, racism and racial discrimination, women's rights. These international instruments of the UN do not completely cover nor prevent human rights violations, especially the rights of the peasants. We see some limitations in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as an instrument to protect peasants' right. Also, the Charter of the Peasant produced by the UN in 1978, was not able to protect peasants from international liberalization policies. The other international conventions, which also deal with peasants' rights, cannot be implemented either. These conventions include: ILO Convention 169, Clause 8-J

> Convention on Biodiversity, Point 14.60 Agenda 21, and Cartagena Protocol. (La Via Campesina 2009)

The movement has succeeded in having this debate at the General Assembly of the United Nations, with the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee producing a study on the "advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas" (UNHRC 2011). At the 16th session of the UN Human Rights Council (Geneva, March 1 to 31, 2011) representatives of La Via Campesina "[fought] for the member states' agreement on this preliminary study", arguing

> 'Peasants all over the world should mobilize in this important step of advancement of their human rights' states Jose Bengoa, member of the Advisory Committee. 'We need to convince States that this is the time for peasants, it is a necessity, to a new instrument to protect the rights of peasants, and also to recognize the right to land in international human rights law'. (La Via Campesina 2011)

In August, 2011, at the 7th session of UN Human Rights Council Advisory Committee representatives from La Via Campesina argued further

> We are deeply convinced that as a long term measure to overcome hunger it is necessary to better define the needs for specific entitlements of peasants as one of the most vulnerable group to violations of human rights in general and to the right to adequate food; to identify potential gaps in the protection of these rights and entitlements; and to present proposals to address these gaps. (FIAN and Campesina 2011)

But how are such debates about international norms and rights enacted and implemented in local and national contexts? If food sovereignty is about protecting local and national rights to food and agricultural production, but draws recourse from emerging international human rights discourses, how is food sovereignty enacted in domestic contexts? Looking at how national and international struggles for food sovereignty work together in this way challenges conventional notions of citizenship and sovereignty that are bounded within and between specific nation-states. Jun Borras (2010) has noted that the shifting structures of global political economy have encouraged rural social movements to localize and internationalize at the same time, resulting in the emergence of "polycentric" rural social movements with different visions of development and demands for level of integration within and among local, regional, and international food systems.

Strategically, although cross border organizing for peasant rights is transnational in character, the ways in which each affiliated organization will pursue those rights differ in national contexts. Movements associated with LVC maintain a self-defined "autonomy" from their respective states and political parties, but they are not, for the most part, "anti-state" or "post-state" – they pursue grassroots mobilization to demand that the state play an active role in recognizing and enacting peasant rights. While members of La Via Campesina share common concerns around food sovereignty, genetically modified seeds, and preserving or enhancing localized food systems, peasant movements in Brazil, for example, are particularly vocal around constitutionally-protected rights to land and provoking alternative means of democratic participation in agricultural policy debates. The following section will outline several areas in

which the discourse of food sovereignty has been "domesticated" in Brazil. In the 1990s, a discursive turn highlighting the environmental sustainability of peasant agriculture – a key claim of food sovereignty proponents - led to a new push for an environmental identity, practically expressed in campaigns for agro-ecology and protection of forest resources. The increasing presence of the "global agri-business threat" to both society and the environment shifted the focus of the MST organizing away from the "latifundio as enemy" – the slogan of the movement until 2006 - to the "international agricultural model" as the organizational target. This shift directly referenced the negative impacts of a global food regime on national food security and environmental degradation, and also signified the need for alliances with urban and environmental movements to scale up and out. As a result, in the 2000s, in the face of a lack of movement on land redistribution under the Lula administration, domestic organizing has centered around the "countryside with dignity" campaign, with an expansion of citizenship claims around housing, environmental protection, and the human right to food. This shift in mobilization has had concrete results in new government policies, a new constitutional amendment on the right to food, and public food procurement programs framed in food sovereignty discourse.

Enacting food sovereignty in Brazil

Brazil is home to the South American regional secretariat of La Via Campesina, located in Brasilia, and five Brazilian peasant movements are formally affiliated with the international organization (the Landless Rural Workers Movement – MST; the Small Farmers Movement – MPA; the Peasant Women's Movement – MMC; the Movement of those Affected by Dams – MAB; and since 2008, the Catholic Rural Youth movement – PRJ). These movements have each been recognized in the context of an International Conference of LVC as meeting the criteria of a grassroots peasant movement that is "independent from any political, economic or other type of affiliation"[3]. These movements have joined forces with six additional Brazilian social movements to form Via Campesina-Brazil (The Brazilian Association of Forest Engineering Studies (ABEEF), the Missionary Indigenous Council (CIMI), the Pastoral Land Commission of the Catholic Church (CPT), the Federation of Agronomy Students of Brazil (FEAB) and the Artisanal Fishers Movement (MPP)). La Via Campesina-Brazil mirrors the international organizing structure, in which regions determine their own campaigns associated with the movement agenda. In 2010, Via Campesina-Brazil published a common platform and analysis of Brazil's political-economic conjuncture in relation to agricultural and rural policy, human rights, and environmental protection, arguing:

> The current agricultural model imposed on Brazil by the forces of capital and by large companies is harmful to the interests of the people. It transforms everything into merchandise: food, nature's gifts (like water, land, biodiversity, and seeds) and it is organized with the sole objective of increasing profit for large companies, transnational corporations, and banks. We urgently need to construct a new agricultural model based on the constant search for a more just and egalitarian society, that produces its necessitates in equilibrium with the environment. (LVC Brazil, 2010).

[3] http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=27&Itemid=45

The platform framed the need for an agricultural policy based on food sovereignty, with specific emphasis on the environmental degradation posed by the current agricultural model and the need to support food production by small-scale producers for the internal market, and demanded specific credit and public procurement programs. In the face of a stalled agrarian reform, these are the areas in which the most movement is seen in implementing food sovereignty in Brazil.

Food sovereignty as an environmental movement

> Men, women, human beings [now live] as if they had dominion over nature. We need to consider that other elements also exist within nature, and for that reason nature must be respected. We need to have a harmonious relation because nature needs humans and humans need nature.[4]

One of the most publicly visible shifts in MST discourse and practices since its inception has been its "coming out" as an environmental movement in the mid 1990s (Wittman 2010). Until this point, the movement had accepted the need for green revolution technologies to maximize agricultural production. But the growing recognition of the environmental and health impacts of conventional agricultural models was becoming increasingly apparent to both the MST and its partner organizations in La Via Campesina. In its international conferences and debates La Vía Campesina began to produce position papers proposing an agro-ecological alternative to the industrial and global-trade based model of agriculture. These documents argue that

> This economic system treats both people and nature as a means to an end with the sole aim of generating profits [and] undermines all forms of small-scale family farm and peasant agriculture which are based on the sustainable use of local resources for the production of quality food for local consumption (La Vía Campesina 2002).

A national coordinator of the MST's Production, Cooperation and Environment Sector explains that, by the end of the 1990s, the movement was operating based on two main concerns related to its environmental practice: a pragmatic concern with the model of production and an ideological concern "entering the dimension of values." As one leader stated:

> In 1998 and 1999, we began to discuss much more this theme of values and the relation between humans and nature. So, the environmental dimension [of our movement] began to gain much more maturity with these two feet: one foot that was more economic, more pragmatic, that has to do with the technological matrix, and the other in the dimension of the ideological sphere, working on this spirit that the farmer is the guardian of nature and of natural resources that here, in Brazil, are fantastic, whether it be water, wild animals, the relation with the forest, the soils, and fundamentally, with seeds (interview Nov 18, 2003).

Following the development of agro-ecological methods among small farmer organizations and movements worldwide (Cohn et al. 2006; Holt-Giménez 2006), the MST has developed localized methods of agro-ecological cultivation in Brazil, with attention to the regional and cultural diversity of small-scale agricultural systems. An important aspect in implementing agro-ecology involves training new agricultural technicians to provide extension in locally-appropriate agro-ecological practices. State and private sector agricultural extension in Brazil is, to quote an MST member, limited to 'teaching us how to read the label on the agro-chemicals'. The MST as a movement has critiqued traditional government technical assistance and built new relationships

[4] Interview #243, peasant leader, Brazil, 16 June 2006.

with regional universities and alternative providers of technical assistance in various locations throughout Brazil. For example, MST members from Mato Grosso are trained in an MST-run agricultural school in southern Brazil, or by several local universities that began an agro-ecological technical training program in 2000 in collaboration with the MST. Another MST-designed farmer-to-farmer extension program called Pé no Chão (Feet on the Ground) trains settlers in low cost, organic home remedies for pests and teaches organic production skills using crop rotation, inter-cropping, and green manure practices. Finally, the MST established a national university in 2005, the Escola Nactional Florestan Fernandes, that regularly trains representatives from other La Via Campesina organizations in Brazil and internationally, in agro-ecological and political organizing methods.

More recently, La Via Campesina-Brazil, and in particularly the MST, has been heavily involved in a national campaign to protest the modification of Brazil's Forest Code, a document that since 1965 has provided a legal framework for the protection of Brazil's forest resources by prohibiting forest clearing on 80% of privately owned land in the Amazon region and 50% in the Cerrado – both areas threatened by rapidly advancing soybean cultivation and pasture. The proposed modifications reduce fines and provide for amnesty on illegal deforestation, in addition to reducing riparian protection standards. Calling on President Dilma Rousseff to veto the modification, LVC – Brazil has joined forces with a coalition of Brazilian environmental movements to "show their resistance to the destruction implemented by agribusiness." [5]

From Land to Social Transformation

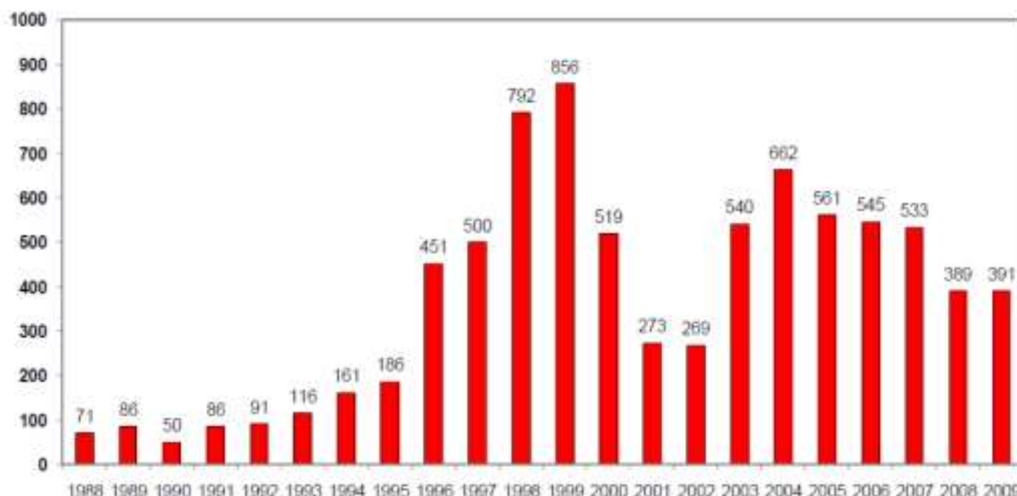
The MST and other social movements were cautiously hopeful about the potential for agrarian reform following Lula's election in 2002. Rural land occupations were scaled down in the period leading up to Lula's election in 2002 (see Table 1 for land occupations) and some rural social movement members assisted in campaign mobilization for the PT during that period.[6] Lula's Program for Dignified Rural Life (O Programa Vida Digna no Campo) and Brazil's 3rd Plan for Agrarian Reform, both enacted early in Lula's mandate also signified a possible movement on historical agrarian demands, with explicit mention of the role of agrarian reform in achieving social, cultural and economic rights and plans to settle 400,000 families on redistributed land between 2003 and 2006 (MDA 2003).

> The rural poor are poor because they don't have access to sufficient land or the appropriate agricultural policies to generate the level of production needed to satisfy their own needs... They are also poor because their rights of citizenship – health, education, food and housing – don't reach the countryside *(MDA 2003-8)*

Table 1: Number of Land Occupations 1988-2009

[5] http://mst.org.br/Codigo-Florestal-o-veto-da-Presidenta-e-a-unica-resposta-que-a-sociedade-pode-exigir Accessed March 26, 2012.

[6] While MST leaders spoke publicly about the commitment of the MST and members of La Via Campesina to a "Lula victory" in 2002, the movement did not officially endorse his candidacy, and many members at the base expressed concern about the extent to which Lula's commitment to the external debt and the continuation of other economic policies of the Cardoso government would limit the extent of agrarian reform in Brazil.



Source: (Dataluta 2010)

Key political appointments in Lula's first administration, including Miguel Rossetto, a PT member and supporter of small-scale agriculture in southern Brazil, as the Minister of Agrarian Development (MDA), also caused great anticipation around the implementation of the PNRA. In a ceremony held on Jan 9, 2003, in the presence of representatives from the MST, CONTAG, and Via Campesina, as well as José Graziano da Silva, the secretary of the Ministry of Food Security and the Fight against Hunger, Minister Rossetto announced the composition of the cabinet positions including the secretaries of family agriculture, territorial development, and land tenure restructuring. Rosetto made regular visits to MST settlements, accompanied by PT representatives during his tenure as MDA minister. Key political appointments were made to INCRA as well – for example, in the central Mato Grosso the INCRA director between 2003-2006 openly expressed support for the MST, regularly meeting the state leadership in the MST office and lending resources, including transportation and supplies, to protests, camps and mobilizations.

By 2004, the national coordination of the MST was less optimistic, arguing that "the correlation of forces changed in our favour with Lula's election, but it is not a radical shift. Change depends on social transformation, not on Lula. Our principle enemy is the large landholder, and we have to struggle against the current agricultural model of agribusiness."[7] By 2009, national MST coordinator João Pedro Stedile argued that international capital had consolidated its domination of Brazilian agriculture, now controlling all aspects of agricultural production including agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizers and machinery, and marketing. Now, it is the transnational model of agriculture itself that is the "enemy" of agrarian reform.

> Before, it was easier. There was an occupation of a latifundio, and we confronted the fazendeiro. Now, when we occupy land, behind the fazendeiro there is a large company protected by the Brazilian state, which now prioritizes production, rather than the elimination of poverty and inequality.[8]

Contrary to the hopes of rural social movements, the political opportunity structure for land redistribution closed, rather than opened, under the Lula administration. The PT had

[7] Fieldnotes, MST-MT regional meeting, 3/26/2004.

[8] http://www.mst.org.br/jornal/289/entrevista , Jornal Sem Terra, January 30, 2009. Accessed 3/22/2012.

formed a coalition government in 2003 to ensure election – making commitments with parties traditionally allied with the rural right and agribusiness interests. Between 2003 and 2006, 213,438 families received land through redistributive land reform in Brazil, just 53 percent of what was promised by the 2003 PNRA (Dataluta 2010). Despite the distribution of over 77 million hectares of land to over one million families between 1979 and 2009 (more than one-third associated with the MST, (Dataluta 2010), Brazil's agrarian structure is more concentrated today than it was in the 1920s.[9] By 2006, the date of Brazil's last agricultural census, less than 1% of owners [those holding more than 1000 hectares] controlled 44% of Brazil's agricultural land, while 90% of farmholdings [the 4.5 million smallholders farming less than 100 hectares] represented just 21% of agricultural land (IBGE 2009).

A slight increase in settlements in 2005 and 2006 reflects the political pressure to maintain rural support for the beleaguered PT, embroiled in a political corruption scandal that peaked in 2005. During this period, Brazil's Coordination of Social Movements, involving the MST and other members of La Via Campesina, did not endorse Lula's re-election campaign in the first round. Despite the participation of almost two million people in government consultations between 2003-2005 (Hochstetler and Friedman 2008), Brazil's social movements expressed widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of movement towards agrarian reform and the ongoing neo-liberalization of the rural economy.

Simply measuring land distributed does not, however, assess the full extent of the transformative impacts of transnational/rural mobilizations in Brazil. Peasant organizing may have initiated around land and other resource conflicts, but in their explicit aim to foster a "broad social transformation" in Brazilian society, the MST and allied movements act simultaneously on several social and political fronts in addition to their struggle to acquire land. Land reform is seen as an essential, but not singular, building block for food sovereignty and agrarian citizenship, a broader framework with numerous entry points in terms of potential policy shifts and institutional support. In effect, the MST's participation in food sovereignty mobilization through La Via Campesina scales up demands from land distribution and agrarian reform to broader social themes of political participation and food sovereignty, a strategy that widens and gains larger levels of national and transnational, rural and urban, and social and political support for the movement.

Fostering new food relations

> 'We work on consumer-producer relationships leading to a different agricultural model.'
> Paul Nicholson, member of International Coordinating Council of LVC, 1993–2008[10]

Hendrickson and Heffernan (2002) have identified a number of challenges to the globalized food system, which, in addition to class and environmental contradictions, include increasing demand by differentiated consumer markets for alternative products and for a closer relationship between consumers and producers. The food sovereignty movement works to take advantage of these spaces by developing new relations between consumers and producers by reworking the form and process of trade. For example, an early LVC statement in 1996 indicated that its members sought to 'promote initiatives which will contribute to the

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[9] http://www.portogente.com.br/texto.php?cod=43547. Miguel Carter notes (2010) that while these numbers are impressive, Brazil ranks last in the percentage of the nation's agricultural workforce that received land (5%) in comparison to other Latin American agrarian reform programs (p191).

[10] Interview 19 November 2008.

development of fair trade with direct participation of producers and consumers' (La Vía Campesina 1996). Many LVC members have been actively involved in promoting legislation that supports food self-sufficiency in various countries, in some cases in collaboration with broader social groups (e.g. Japan, South Korea) while in other cases challenging dominant agricultural groups heavily involved in agricultural consolidation and export-based commodity production (Desmarais 2002; FSPI 2006).[11] Among LVC member groups internationally, some farmers involved in large-scale or export oriented production practices lobby for agricultural policies that increase support for national agricultural systems. Other individual peasant movements have taken local action to alter the relationships between producers and consumers at local and regional levels.

In the 2000s, in the face of a lack of movement on land redistribution under the Lula administration, the MST's domestic organizing has centered around the "countryside with dignity" campaign, with an expansion of citizenship claims around housing, environmental protection, and the human right to food. This shift in mobilization has had concrete results in new government policies, including a constitutional amendment to the right to food, and the legislation of public food procurement programs framed in food sovereignty discourse. MST efforts to link agrarian reform to food sovereignty illustrate how peasant initiatives may stimulate change from a commodity-production structure - the dominant "agri-business model" - to an alternative food regime that fosters closer relations between producers, consumers, and the local environment.

For example, the central Brazilian state of Mato Grosso has long been an extractivist, export-oriented economy, transitioning from diamonds, timber, cattle, and sugarcane to being the 'soybean export capital of the world', achieved in the mid-1990s after investment by international and national agribusiness in the development of soybean varieties that could survive local ecological conditions. Food security is an issue in the region; with arable land dominated by export commodities, food for local consumption is often trucked in from coastal Brazil.

At the same time, increasing unemployment and a demand for land by workers led to the establishment of a number of agrarian reform settlements that challenged the previously dominant frontier model of colonization in this region. These alternative 'ecological' land reform settlements are organized in peri-urban environments by social movements in Mato Grosso, primarily associated with the MST but also with rural worker's unions, the Catholic pastoral land commission (CPT), and other agricultural organizations (Wittman 2007, 2010). Several of the new settlements established farmer's markets to compete with the company supermarkets in soybean processing centres, and community supported agriculture (CSA) subscription programs were also initiated in several communities, along with public donations of food to schools, hospitals, and food banks. In its proposal for a 'family farm based sustainable agriculture', La Vía Campesina argues that products grown for their own families and consumers of the same region 'assures contact and transparency between farmers and consumers' (La Via Campesina 2002). Members of the MST also reference farmer's markets and local distribution networks as places for 'educating' consumers about differences between local and global food systems, and the importance of fostering a regional food production regime that could promote food sovereignty through sustainable agriculture.

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[11] Peasant movements have collaborated with governments in Japan, Korea, and Ecuador, among others, to propose food self-sufficiency targets (e.g. in 2000, Japan set a 45% food self-sufficiency target for 2010). In February 2009, the Ecuadorian legislative assembly passed a Food Sovereignty Law that regulates the agricultural, fishing, and forestry sectors.

The Right to Food, Public Procurement and Food Sovereignty

In the mid 1980s, members of Brazilian civil society - mainly from health and social welfare organizations - organized the First National Conference on Food and Nutrition, and contributed wording to the revised 1988 constitution around the protection of economic, social and cultural rights. By the early 2000s, and especially after 2003 with the expansion of the Fome Zero program under the Lula government, the right to food movement (including the presentation of a constitutional amendment on the right to food, successfully passed in 2010) became more explicitly connected with rural movements for agrarian reform and food sovereignty, with successful insertion of sovereignty language in new food discourses and policies. A 2006 Law on Food Security acknowledges that

> The realization of the human right to adequate food and to food and nutritional security requires respect for sovereignty, that confer on countries the primacy of their decisions around the production and consumption of food (Lei Nº 11.346, 9/15/2006)

A 2010 decree upholding the Food Security law also indicates support for

> Promoting sustainable agro-ecological systems for producing and distributing food, that respect biodiversity and strengthen family agriculture, indigenous peoples, and traditional communities that ensure the consumption and access to adequate and healthy food, respecting the diversity of national food cultures… incorporating into State policy respect for food sovereignty and the human right to adequate food. (Decree Nº 7.272, 8/25/2010)

In Brazil, rural social movements associated with La Via Campesina have been successful in pushing for government implementation of this food sovereignty discourse by linking agrarian reform to Brazil's domestic food security policies. Guaranteed markets for agricultural production had been part of the MST's platform since its inception in the 1980s, and this demand was effectively incorporated into larger umbrella of food sovereignty. Beginning in 2003, the federal Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS) developed series of food security programs that involve public procurement of agricultural production from agrarian reform settlements for distribution to schools, hospitals, and other national food security initiatives. For example, the Fome Zero Food Acquisition program (PAA) involved 120,000 farmers associated with agrarian reform settlements in 2008, and this food was distributed to about one-quarter of Brazil's food insecure population (Chmielewska and Souza 2010). Since 2003, the program has purchased 2.6 million tons of food in more than 2300 Brazilian municipalities with the objective of "promoting food sovereignty and security through the acquisition of local agro-biodiversity" (MDS 2010a).

A 2009 law establishing a National School Meal Program (Lei 11.947/09) also requires that 30% of school food program budgets be utilized in direct purchases from smallholder agriculture, a step regarded by the Brazilian Forum for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security as "one of the most strategic public policies for guarantee of food sovereignty in Brazil" (Schottz n.d.). A national workshop on the PAA program in November 2010 involved smallholder farmers and federal, state and local government representatives, and resulted in a strategic vision for the program between 2011-2014. According to the national secretary for Food Security and Nutrition of the MDS, Crispim Moreria, "we collectively constructed an agenda that contains elements proposed by social movements, speakers, and debaters…for the program to be scaled up in collaboration with the promotion of food sovereignty and the right to food for all Brazilians" (MDS 2010b).

The National Council on Food Security (CONSEA) was a principle sponsor of the FAO Special Conference for Food Sovereignty, for Rights and for Life; it funded members of Brazilian social movements to attend the People's Forum for Food Sovereignty in Rome in 2009, and funded and gave a keynote address at the annual international Agro-Ecology Conference organized by La Via Campesina in southern Brazil in 2010. The federal "Citizenship Territories" program, launched in 2008 by the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) with a R$ 25 million budget, also makes explicit links to the food sovereignty paradigm. The objective of this program is to "promote economic development and universalize basic citizenship programs [through] social participation and integration of federal, state, and municipal actions" (MAPA 2008).

Mobilizing Food Sovereignty as Agrarian Citizenship

In 2010, the Brazilian Ministry of Social Development and the Fight Against Hunger distributed a promotional pamphlet entitled "Citizenship: the Principle Ingredient of Fome Zero". This document, along with the approximation of social welfare and agrarian supports in recent food security policy, exemplifies the rooting of a domestic food sovereignty discourse in Brazil. It also represents the realization of longstanding mobilizations by rural movements like the MST to recognize both the rights and obligations of small-scale food producers in supporting national food security through environmentally and socially sustainable agricultural production systems.

Cross sector participation around food and agriculture allows more than just a focus on citizenship's 'legal obligations and entitlements' - such as the right to food - (Hickey 2010; Hickey and Mohan 2005) instead moving towards a more nuanced attention to what is actually going on in the countryside – participation in what, and for whom? It is precisely the struggle to overcome these differences through participation in material and political struggles – via multiple roles of producer, activist, and local/global citizen (Newell 2008, 367)– that constitutes the contemporary landscape of the struggles for agrarian citizenship and food sovereignty (Wittman 2009a, b). In that sense, contemporary assertions of agrarian citizenship are not a 'clientelistic incorporation of the [rural] poor' (Fox 1994) through the imposition of compensatory social welfare policies but rather a creation of space for dialectical negotiation between agriculture, state, and society.

Democracy in Brazil is characterized by a long but contested experience of political mobilization, a concession to social movement demands for consultation and "a relationship between the state and civil society that may lead to social and political inclusion" (Avritzer 2010, 182). In accordance with the examples above regarding insertion of food sovereignty discourse into government public programs, civil society in Brazil also has a fairy thick recent history of "political interlocution" with government agencies oriented towards issues related to rural development and social exclusion (Friedman and Hochstetler 2002).

Brazilian agrarian social movements have mobilized on the basis of the constitutionally mandated mechanism of "popular referendum" or popular consultation.[12] In 1998, in coordination with the international movement Jubilee 2000 for the cancellation of international debt, a coalition of Brazilian social movements, led by the Catholic Church, held a symposium on external debt and created the Jubilee 2000 Campaign/Brazil, resulting in the 1999 External Debt Tribunal and the organization of a national referendum on the Debt in 2000. As part of the popular referendum, over 150,000 people participated in seminars and public events around the

[12] 1988 Constitution, art. 14, I e II c/c art. 49 inc. XV.

debt and over 6 million people voted. In 2002, a similar referendum on the Free Trade Area of the Americas garnered votes by 10 million people. The National Fórum for Agrarian Reform and Justice in the Countryside (FNRA), comprised of more 54 Brazilian social movements that have worked since the 1980s to pressure state, judicial and legislative action around land reform and rural violence, organized the latest national referendum. The Popular Plebiscite on Limits to Property was carried out between Sept 1-12, 2010, and more than 520,000 Brazilians voted in 23 states [in 3 additional states, petitions were signed in lieu of voting]. More than 95 percent of voters agreed that large landholdings should be limited in Brazil, while 94% agreed that a "limit on landholdings in Brazil would increase the production of healthy food and improve living conditions in rural and urban areas" (FNRA 2010a). According to Vanderlei Martini, a representative of Via Campesina-Brazil and member of the MST national coordinating council, the popular referendum is intended to extend democratic debate beyond the organizations already associated with the campaign, to reach wider society and question "not only the size of landholdings, but what is the model of development that we want?" (FNRA 2010b).

Building on the momentum of popular referendums and coalitions, more than 40 social movements, including those associated with La Via Campesina, have joined in the development of the Popular Assembly, an alternative legislative assembly based on "sovereignty of the people" that "coordinates and articulates people's organizations" in the construction of "authentic democracy" (Asambleia Popular n.d.). This assembly seeks a new vision for Brazil, based on linking individual movement campaigns for agrarian reform, food sovereignty, dam resettlement and reparations, women's rights, labour rights, and environmental protection. It is, above all, a way to bring issues of rural and agrarian life to the public for democratic consideration.

A food sovereignty movement based on agrarian citizenship may not yet constitute a 'coherent political economy of an alternative global agrarianism' (Akram-Lodhi 2007, 556). Given the geographic diversity of the member associations of movements like La Vía Campesina, as well as internal and regional contestations over longstanding issues of gender, class, and ethnicity both within and between movements, the constitution of a unified or cohesive agro-ecological alternative to globalized and capitalist agriculture may not be immediately forthcoming. However, globally emerging signals of change, and international dialogue around new principles of agrarian citizenship and food sovereignty, as evidenced in the diversity practices of groups like the MST and LVC, are signs that movements and individuals are recognizing and acting upon fissures and contradictions in the current system. Participation in transnational activism has pushed the Brazilian state marginally closer to the "high road to globalization" (Korzeniewicz and Smith 2000) in making rural overtures as part of its highly successful social welfare programs. It is perhaps the geographical, ecological, social and economic diversity of this activity, rather than its uniformity, that will best be able to address socio-ecological contradictions in the global food system.

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